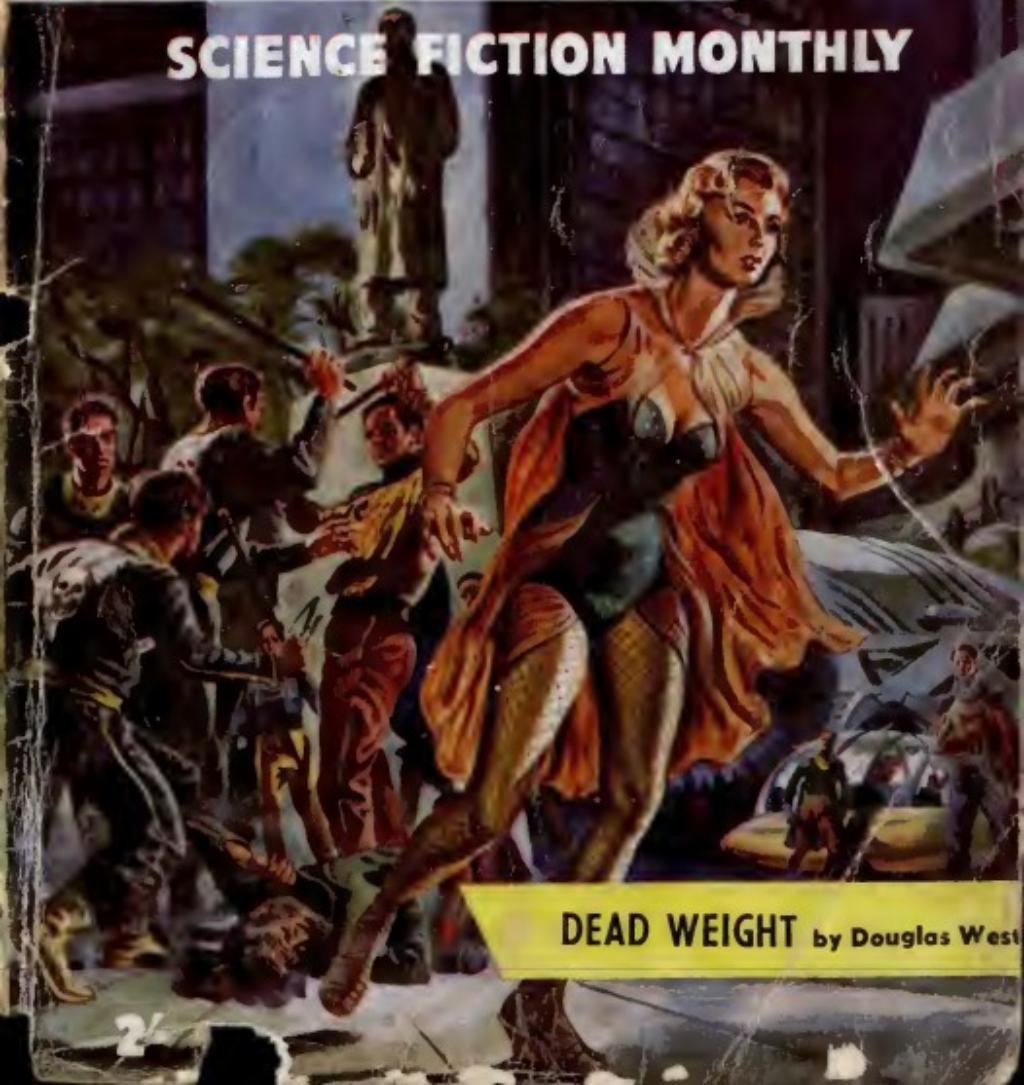


ACTION - SCIENCE - ROMANCE - ADVENTURE

NO
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AUTHENTIC

SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY



DEAD WEIGHT by Douglas West

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editorial



IN HIS BOOK REVIEWS this month Alec F. Harby touches on something which may have some bearing on what Sam Moskowitz said a few years ago.

Sam Moskowitz is an American who cut his teeth on the early pulps and is as much a part of science fiction fandom as anyone could be. His statement was that something he called "a sense of wonder" has been lost in modern science fiction and, because of that, the field is failing to raise as much enthusiasm as it did in the past.

To clarify; Sam isn't arguing about a specific reason for this loss of the sense of wonder, he merely states that it doesn't seem to be around now as it used to be. Old readers of SF will understand what he is talking about. In those days when to be found in possession of a science fiction magazine was to risk parental displeasure, the derision of friends or the pitying looks of those who classified it as "trash," reading science fiction was, in itself, an adventure. The magazines were few, not too easy to come by and youthful imaginations just couldn't

get enough of the right sort of diet.

Now we don't have that problem. Young readers of today are not denied their opportunity of reading what has come to be accepted as a reputable form of literature. But do they get the same sense of wonder from their reading as we used to? Sam says they don't, and without being too specific he hints that the stories may have something to do with it.

I am inclined to agree.

I know, of course, that repletion brings satiation. The first stories gave us a sense of wonder because they were the first. Now, rereading them, I sometimes wonder just what made them seem so good. Over two decades and uncounted stories since read may have had something to do with it. Probably it has, but what of the newcomers to the field? Do they, I wonder, put down their magazines filled with that elusive sense of wonder?

I doubt it. And, in a sense, I can't blame them any more than I can blame them for not getting enthusiastic over the works of Jules Verne. Verne, to the young readers of today, did not write

science fiction. His inventions show a lack of reality at variance with what we have in the modern world. He offers them no new visions, no great enterprises—probable enterprises that is—and any schoolboy can pick holes in his science. Reality has caught and passed him by. It is catching modern authors and passing them by, too, but I think it goes deeper than that.

For a long time now the trend of science fiction writing has been towards better characterization and realism. The old gimmick-stories of the past, with their impossible science, ludicrous situations and characters which were a joke, have passed into limbo regretted by none. In their place we have stories with realistic plots, logical situations and men and women who are, at least, human. We should, therefore, be getting better science fiction. We are getting better science fiction, better written, that is, but somehow, in this turning towards reality, something the old stories had has been lost.

The trouble is—how close can we get to reality and still be writing science fiction?

Changing the terminology, as Harby points out, isn't enough. Taking a story which could be happening here and now within our own society and dressing it up with a few fancy words doesn't

automatically make it a science fiction story. To write a good science fiction story an author needs imagination, the inclination to use it and the desire to be different. And he mustn't be afraid of using his imagination.

Science fiction, on the face of it, is the easiest form of literature to write there is. The author can pick his own space and time, invent his own framework of logic, bypass accepted scientific limitations and really go to town. He can do all this and get away with it—providing he does it logically. It is that reservation which makes writing science fiction not quite the easy thing it seems to be.

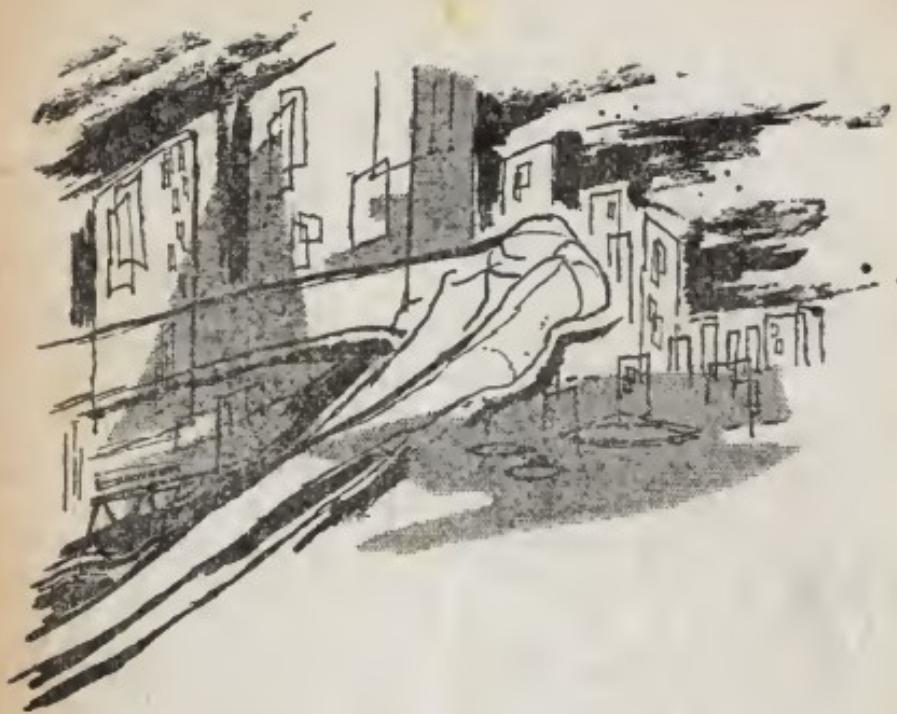
There is a danger in that, in order to give his story a sense of reality, a writer will stick firmly to the familiar. The result is that we get stories which are science fiction only by virtue of their terminology. Remove or alter that terminology and we are left with nothing like what a science fiction story should be.

The old-type stories had little to commend them, but one thing they did have—the courage to break away from the familiar. The modern type of story has much to commend it—but they lack that elusive something the oldtimers had.

Maybe it would be a good idea if the two extremes could get together.

E.C.T.





DEAD WEIGHT

by DOUGLAS WEST

Doctor Blue had done more than banish natural death. He had laid the foundation of a situation which could destroy the world

FIRST OF THREE PARTS

THE TROUBLE STARTED IN Nations Square. A corner-prophet had climbed the plinth of Blue's statue and was haranguing a small crowd. He was a gaunt man with sunken eyes and a straggling beard. He wore a tattered suit which had once been mauve but was now a dark brown with dirt and wear. Sandals covered his bare feet and his speech was interrupted by bouts of violent coughing. He was about sixty years old and should have had better sense than to stand thinly clad in the open at the beginning of winter. He was also wasting his time.

Sam Falkirk eased his weight from one foot to the other as he stood at the edge of the crowd and listened to the thin, strident voice of the corner-prophet. It was the usual tirade; a plea for the Blues to be allowed civil rights and representation, an attack against society for not permitting them to offer their labour in the open market, and a complaint that, though legally dead, they still had to pay taxes on everything they bought.

Sam had heard it all before and only stayed because he had ten minutes to kill before returning to duty. Behind the statue the soaring

bulk of the World Council buildings lifted towards the sky, framing the end of the square and facing on the Hudson. Within the buildings air-conditioning kept the offices at a comfortable temperature, but Sam liked to feel the incipient bite of winter in the fresh air.

Also the speaker amused him. Sam could guess at his exact progress. He would rant and rave, shake his fist and make tremendous demands while all the time the crowd would watch with apathetic contempt. Some might heckle him a little, others might shout personal abuse, but mostly the corner-prophets were tolerated as sort of modern-age clowns. Sam had overlooked the teenagers.

They had joined the crowd so quietly that he wasn't aware of their presence until they started business. There were about twenty of them, all males, all wearing tight black jerseys, tight black pants, thick-soled shoes and long-peaked caps pulled over their eyes. The jerseys were marked front and back with a white, grinning skull. Each of them carried a long walking stick. Sam had seen similar sticks before. They were lead-loaded and could snap a shin or crush a skull as if the bone were made of eggshell.

Sam was no coward, but he

knew his limitations. The crowd would be no help; they wouldn't want to get hurt. The corner-prophet, the obvious target for the young hooligans, was surrounded. At best he could expect a beating; at worst he could be killed or so crippled that life would be a torment. And Sam, if he tried anything on his own, would receive the same treatment. Gently he eased himself from the crowd.

The nearest videophone booth was occupied. Sam jerked open the door, pulled out a protesting woman, and shut himself in the booth. He pressed the emergency button, waited until the screen flashed to life and identified himself.

"Captain Sam Falkirk of the World Police. Emergency call to local police. Trouble due at Nations Square. Blue's statue. Teenagers, about twenty of them, on a Blue-hunt."

"I'll handle it." The screen went blank as the operator cut the connection.

Outside the booth the woman was still fuming with outraged dignity. Sam hesitated, about to apologize, then changed his mind as he saw what was happening around the statue. The teenagers had moved in, swinging their

sticks against legs and heads to clear a path to where the corner-prophet huddled in helpless terror. Sam reached the plinth just too late. A dozen of the toughs laughed and joked as they poked and prodded at the prophet writhing and screaming on the ground. Sam dodged a stick swinging at his skull, snatched at it and, at the same time, kicked its owner in the stomach. The stick in his hands, he jumped forward to straddle the prostrate man, felt something hit his shoulder and just managed to parry a vicious thrust at his eyes.

The next few seconds were a blur of motion as he lashed desperately at the ring of hooligans. Their clothing was padded and Sam, a grown man, couldn't bring himself to hit full-strength at the youngsters. They had no such compunction. Sam would have been beaten to a pulp but for the arrival of the police.

They came whining up on their crash bikes, over a dozen of them, and at the sound of their approach the teenagers melted away, running lightly for the substrips where they would be safe.

"You hurt?" A burly sergeant, recognizing Sam by his uniform, halted by his side.

"No." Sam examined himself to make sure. "No, I'm all right.

I wouldn't have been though if you hadn't arrived so soon." He looked to where two officers stooped over the prophet. "How is he?"

"He'll live." One of the men straightened. "Needs hospitalization, though."

"Send for the ambulance." The sergeant returned his attention to Sam. "Did you recognize any of them?"

"The teenagers?" Sam shook his head. "Not personally. They all wore skull-markings though; that should help."

"It won't." The sergeant was pessimistic. "I know that bunch; they'll cover each other up no matter what." He shrugged. "Well, it's just another of those things. Thanks, anyway, captain. No need for you to hang around if you're busy."

It was, as the sergeant had said, just another of those things. There was no surprise or horror at the thought of a gang of young hooligans beating a man almost to death for the sheer fun of it. No explanation, either, though the psychologists had tried. They said the Blue-baiting was due to a need for excitement, a desire on the part of the youngsters to assert themselves or a breaking through of the primitive. For

private consumption they had a different reason. They said that it was due to a conditioned hatred of all Blues and anything appertaining to them. It was, they said, a natural revolt of youth against age.

Which didn't really account for the teenagers having chosen the corner-prophet as a victim, though, with his white hair and beard and unhealthy pallor he could have passed for a Blue. None of them, apparently, had bothered to check for the star he should have had tattooed on the back of his left hand.

A man was waiting for Sam as he entered the vestibule. He was a plump man, wearing a suit of lime-green edged with white piping. His face was round and smooth but his hair was touched with grey and the skin beneath his eyes was soft and flaccid. He carried a brief case in one hand. He stepped forward with an ingratiating smile.

"Captain Falkirk?"

"Yes?"

"I'd like to speak with you for a moment if I may." He produced a card. "Frank Perbright, Acme Insurance."

"Not interested." Sam brushed past the man and headed for the

elevators. Perbright, not to be dissuaded, scurried at his side.

"Please, captain, this is important." He looked at the humming activity all around them. "If we could go somewhere quiet? Your office, perhaps?"

"Is this official business?" Sam stared at the plump man. "If it is, you'd better come up to my office. If it isn't, then we can speak down here. Well?"

"It isn't official business," admitted Perbright. He didn't sound happy about it. "But it is important."

"To whom?" Sam felt that he could guess the answer but he didn't feel like arguing. He led the way to a lecture room, peeped inside and gestured to Perbright. The room was occupied by a visiting class of schoolchildren and the lecturer was telling them about the greatest discovery of all time. He was a good speaker, his words clear and distinct, and his command of the students was absolute. He was a good instructor. He was a hundred and twenty years old.

"Doctor Edward Henry Clarence Blue discovered his serum ninety-five years ago now, back in 1967. The serum is a combination of radioactive isotopes which, in some way, wash the body free of age-poisons and arrest the ad-

vance of old age. It does more than that. It partially restores youth, in that it allows the body to rebuild itself without hindrance from those poisons. An old man will grow more youthful. His arteries will regain their elasticity, his joints lose their accumulations of uric deposits and his bones become less brittle. And, for some reason, he will also be proof against disease. He will, in effect, be immortal."

Sam edged his way into the room as the instructor paused, Perbright following him. They sat down at the back of the lecture room. The instructor glanced towards them, then resumed his discourse.

"Just why that should be so no one quite knows. No one knows why, by some freak action of the serum, all melanin is bleached from the body so that Blues, as those who take the treatment are popularly called, are always albinos." The instructor lifted his left hand and showed the star tattooed on the back, above the fingers. "The second identifying mark is this star."

He didn't, Sam noticed, explain the purpose of the star. Many Blues had tried to disguise themselves with make-up and dye and so take and hold jobs normally reserved for non-Blues. The com-

pulsory tattoo was a way of preventing such deception. He turned as Perbright called to him.

"Captain Falkirk."

"What is it?"

"Just this," the plump man drew coloured folders from his brief case, "captain, I'd like to explain the details of our new policy. I feel that it is one of the most beneficial ever offered to the public, and is of special interest to those in your position. I . . ."

"I thought you said that this was important," interrupted Sam irritably. "I'm already insured."

"But only against sickness and the cost of treatment when it becomes necessary," said Perbright quickly. "But what of the future, captain? Have you ever thought of that?" He rifled the folders. "Now, for just one fifth of your income during the term of your natural life we guarantee to provide you with Restezee facilities after you have taken the treatment."

"Not interested," said Sam curtly.

"But, captain!" Perbright sounded desperate. "You just can't afford not to be interested. Let me point out that . . ."

Sam sat back, relaxing and letting the plump man's words

pass over his head. He wasn't interested in insurance, though, apparently, the insurance companies were in him. They were probably still trying to recoup the money they had lost in paying out annuities and pensions long after they had expected. When Blue had announced his discovery they had been the ones to immediately suffer. Life policies and endowments had stopped and everyone had turned to annuities. The tardy legislation which had legally killed all Blues had been engineered by the insurance companies as a matter of sheer self defence. Something Perbright said attracted his attention.

"Now, wait a minute," said Sam. "This doesn't make sense. You say that for one fifth of my income I'll be taken care of for as long as I want. Right?"

"That's perfectly right, captain."

"Well, how can you do it? Even if I manage to last another thirty years, that still only enables you to keep me for six at my accustomed standard. What's the catch?"

"No catch, captain." Perbright became more persuasive. "Naturally, you will be expected to help out by doing some work, but that's to be expected."

"Is it?" Sam was thoughtful. "I think that I'd better have the

department look into this. If your company is thinking of starting a Blue sweat-shop it had better be investigated."

"It's legal," protested Perbright. "And what can you lose? The way things are you've got no future. You're unmarried, without children and all on your own."

"That's enough." Sam was annoyed. "I don't like being investigated by cheapskate operators. You'd better go before I have you thrown out."

"I'm going." Perbright grabbed at his brief case. "But think it over, captain. If you want me you can find me in the book."

Alone, Sam sat and tried to control his anger. He didn't like being taken for a fool, and Perbright had pulled something too raw to stomach. That part about children, for example . . .

Sam blinked as he heard his name. The instructor, smiling from where he stood on the dais, beckoned to him.

"Now for a few words from Captain Falkirk of the World Police. I want you to pay great attention to what he has to say. Captain Falkirk."

Sam rose, feeling a little foolish beneath the steady stare of sixty pairs of eyes. It wouldn't have been so bad had he been a heroic character, someone over six feet

tall, say, with wide shoulders and the profile of a telly star. But he was just an ordinary, quiet-seeming man with brown hair and brown eyes and a sensitive mouth. His figure, thanks to gymnastics, was good, and he had a certain appeal to women. A cheeky-faced tot winked at him as he climbed the dais and he felt a lot better.

He knew, too, what he was expected to say; he had done this at odd times before. He rested his hands on the table in unconscious imitation of the instructor, leaned a little towards the microphone and came straight to the point.

"You have heard your instructor tell you something of the past and how it has affected the present. You may be wondering what I have to say to you. The answer is this. I want to remind you that we all live in one world, that we are one people and that the youth of today is the old person of tomorrow."

He paused, staring at them, wondering what impression he was making. Probably none; children have short memories.

"Soon you will be teenagers," he continued. "You may have heard some of the things which teenagers are supposed to do. Some of them actually do such things, but it isn't funny or clever

to do them. It isn't funny to go on a Blue-bait, it isn't clever to gang up against a man old enough to be your great-great-great-grandfather, it isn't amusing to deride old people for being old. Most of you have Blues living at home. You may have heard your parents, at times, talking about them as if they were a nuisance. Some of you may even feel that life would be much easier if they weren't around. That is the wrong attitude."

Wrong, but who could blame them? Unless they had special qualifications, Blues were in a bad way. Some were protected by the government, a few scientists and others of value, but the great majority, able to find only casual work, were mostly objects of charity. Work was found for them when possible, but no Blue could be legally or morally employed while a non-Blue needed work.

For the young had their own lives to live, families to raise and relations to support. Each new generation had the task of helping to support those who had gone before. A man now raised a large family so that, when he took the treatment, the children he had raised could support him. Some did, others didn't. Some meekly

bore the filial yoke, while others cut free from responsibility and started out fresh on their own. No one could blame them; they committed no crime, but unsupported Blues, crippled by their lack of legal rights, became pitiful objects.

It was better for society if the family bond remained strong. But the young, at times, are thoughtlessly cruel. At all times they are impatient.

"Be kind," ended Sam. "Be patient. Be understanding. At all times remember that, one day, you, too, will be a Blue. Always think of that when you are with them. What they are, you will be. Treat them as such."

The instructor dismissed the class then and thanked Sam for his trouble.

"Part of my job." Sam remembered the incident by the statue. "If we can persuade one of those children to refrain from joining in a Blue-bait, then no trouble is too much. If we can instil in them the concept that all Blues are just as human and just as normal as they are, then any amount of trouble is justified. The time to prevent crime is during the formative years. Punishing them later is an admission that our educational techniques are at fault."

"I agree." Absently the in-

structor rubbed the back of his left hand. "If we had full control of the children for the first fifteen years of their lives we could build a model society." He shrugged. "The usual lament. We teach them one thing and their parents, by example, teach them another." He became thoughtful. "You mentioned Blue-baiting. Is it bad?"

"It's getting worse, and it's not only confined to teenagers. There have been reports of lynch-mobs at work." Sam looked grim. "It's the same principle, though they aren't composed of teenagers. Many against one and God help the individual."

"And the individual is always a Blue." The instructor shuddered. "Horrible! To think that men could do such things!"

"They do them." Sam glanced at his watch. "I'm late. You'll pardon me?"

"Of course." The instructor held out his hand. "And thank you again for your trouble."

"It was no trouble," said Sam. "I like kids." It was true, too. Perhaps not in the mass, but he would have liked a couple of his own. A boy, say, like the one who had winked at him, and a girl like the one with the pigtails and the candy-striped frock.

Outside in the vestibule Sam paused to stare through the doors

to where the statue of Blue dominated the square. The late October sunshine shone on the polished granite and a few pigeons fluttered over the sidewalks on their eternal search for crumbs. Everything looked very peaceful.

Sam didn't know that trouble was heading towards him at twenty-five hundred miles an hour.

II

TWO YEARS EARLIER, ON THE island of Hainan, south of the province of Kwang-Tung, the first soil had been turned for the construction of a big new Chorella plant now completed and ready for operation. It was a World Council project, naturally; no one else had either the money or the inclination to spend over a billion dollars in order to provide a source of cheap, nutritious food for the Orient.

Senator Sucamari conducted the opening ceremony, his clipped Cantonese matching his yellow skin and slanted eyes, his face impassive as he pressed the button which started the primary pumps. Senator Rayburn represented the Occident, but where Rayburn concentrated on smiling into the newsfax cameras which transmitted the scene all over the world,

the Japanese knew better. Instead, he terminated the ceremony with a short speech emphasizing the dire need of many more such installations, praised various ancestors and managed, without apparent effort or intention, to make the American appear an ill-mannered schoolboy.

Rayburn was glad when it was all over.

From Hainan to Manila was roughly a thousand miles, and the slow-moving local transport planes took over two hours to complete the journey. From Manila to New York was more than ten times the distance, but the big stratoliner would cover it in just double the time, soaring high above the atmosphere in an elliptical curve which would terminate in the Hudson. From there to the World Council buildings on Manhattan would take another hour.

Rayburn didn't like the journey. Air transport was as safe as could be devised, but there was always the element of risk. He stared down through the window by his seat at the earth below, showing a distinct curvature at this height, and tried to rid himself of the thought of what would happen should anything go wrong. Probably nothing but a little discomfort. The pressurized cabin could

be detached from the main structure and would parachute down to safety. It was buoyant, fitted with shock absorbers and contained its own radio-sending equipment, together with emergency rations and crash gear. The worst that could happen was that the passengers would have to wait for rescue.

But it was a long, long way down. And the tanks behind the cabin were awash with highly explosive fuel for the rockets which had lifted them so high. And perhaps, if anything did happen, the parachutes wouldn't open, and they would go falling, falling, falling . . . Rayburn shook his head to rid himself of morbid thoughts and stared about the cabin.

Across the aisle Nagati sat reading, a fat, diplomatic bag resting between his feet. Ahead of his aide, Sucamari, seemingly relaxed, stared at something invisible before him. Rayburn didn't like the Japanese; he was too calm, too bland, too polite. It was impossible to tell what went on inside that small, round head, behind that emotionless, eternal smile. Sucamari was always smiling, except when, as now, he stared at something other men couldn't see. His own thoughts

Rayburn imagined; sometimes he did the same thing himself. The Japanese suddenly turned, his smile flicking on as he met Rayburn's stare.

"Nice opening," said Rayburn. He was never put out by the unexpected.

"It gave joy to many," said Sucamari. He spoke better English than the American, and his Cantonese had been equal to that of a native. Rumour had it that he spent long hours with a hypnototutor in order to perfect his linguistic ability. Rayburn didn't know about that, and he didn't care. He himself only spoke one language, his own, and left the interpreters to worry about the translations.

"It may have given joy to those on the receiving end," he said pointedly. "But I'm not so sure about the rest."

"Is charity, then, a lost virtue?"

"Charity begins at home."

"Home?" Sucamari's smile didn't alter. "Is not the world our home?"

"You know what I mean," snapped Rayburn. "The World Council levies a toll on each country according to its productivity and natural wealth. The Americas pay more than anyone else. We've our own troubles, too,

you know, and we can't be expected to keep paying out vast sums for the benefit of backward peoples."

"Backward?" Sucamari's smile became a little strained. "May I remind you that the Orient contains cultures which were old before the Americas were discovered? I would not call them backward."

"That is your opinion." Rayburn held out his left hand. Despite the insecticides with which the plant-area had been saturated, the flies had been a nuisance. He pointed to the bites. "Is this an example of progress? Disease-carriers allowed to breed unchecked on deliberately exposed filth?" He was referring to the habit of the natives in using natural waste products to fertilize their land instead of washing it down into sewers for scientific processing.

"Old habits die hard," said Sucamari quietly. "And what else can they do? The soil is poor, worked out, and the supply of phosphates and artificial fertilizers scarce. They merely do as their ancestors did before them."

"Ancestors!" Rayburn was about to say more when caution dictated silence. Sucamari was an Oriental, educated in the Occident-

though he might be. Ancestor worship was a part of his culture, and to speak against it would be to attack his religious beliefs. "At least," he said mildly, "they could try harder to exterminate the pests."

"They could, but they won't," agreed Sucamari. "Most of them are Buddhists and, to them, all life is sacred, even that of the lowliest insects. There have been unpleasant incidents at the sites of the spray-aircraft and others when extermination teams have tried to wipe out unwanted carnivores and other low-life forms." He shrugged. "Foolish, perhaps, but there it is."

"Foolish is right," said Rayburn. "As I understand it the Buddhists believe in re-incarnation of the soul into animals and other creatures. Well, now that there is no natural death they don't have to worry about reincarnation, do they? So why cling to the old beliefs?"

"Your logic is at fault; that, or your understanding of Buddhism." Sucamari was very patient. "People still die, you know, and infant mortality in the Orient is quite high. Also, no matter how many people are alive now, they cannot be more than all the people who have lived before them. So, to a Buddhist, there are still a number

of souls awaiting rebirth in human form."

"Foolishness," repeated Rayburn. "Dangerous foolishness at that. With their unsanitary conditions they are begging for trouble in allowing vermin to exist as they do."

"Perhaps, but what can we do? Religious freedom must be respected or there can be no freedom."

It was defeat, as it was always defeat, when he argued with the Japanese. Rayburn slumped back into his seat and stared moodily through the window. Words, always words, and yet words had their uses as he well knew. He could whip an audience into a frenzy with carefully chosen phrases which touched off predictable responses but, when it came to the test, what were words? Only a means to gain control of force, the final argument against which words were useless.

And the final argument was coming.

Rayburn remembered the long, patient lines of coolies back in Hainan. The dense woods which had once covered the island had long since been cleared away so as to make room for tiny farms, little patches of dirt from which the natives tried to scratch a living.

But while the productivity of the soil was limited, that of the natives was not.

They bred because they had to breed. They mated and produced children so as to gain more labour to work the worn-out soil, then had to repeat the cycle again and again. And everything was against them—their religion which forbade the killing of the very lice which sucked their blood and, worst of all, the ancestor worship which had suddenly acquired a new meaning.

Ancestors, in the old days, had done little harm. They had stifled progress, true, but they had also maintained a culture. The living had burned paper symbols of money and food so as to provide for them in the afterworld; symbols which had cost but a fraction of the things they represented. But living ancestors could not be fed on paper loaves or live in paper houses. Legal death, in the Orient, was ignored; the elders were too highly respected for that. So families beggared themselves to support their living ancestors on a steadily declining subsistence level.

But for how long would they be content with that?

Rayburn sighed, glanced towards Sucamari and then looked away. Still that eternal smile, even

when engrossed in his thoughts. It was a mask, Rayburn knew, and a scrap of poorly-remembered prose came to him learned long ago. "*I can smile, and murder as I smile*"—Shakespeare? Possibly the old playwright had known more about human nature than most people gave him credit for, and it was the sort of thing he would have written. Gerald would know if he took the trouble to ask, but his aide was asleep, lying back with closed eyes, his parted lips making him look more of a fool than when awake.

He himself couldn't act as Sucamari did. Not for him the bland, emotionless smile, the iron mask of a facial grimace. Rayburn settled deeper in his seat toying with the scrap of prose, turning and twisting it until it fitted: "*I can make others smile, and murder them as they smile*." That was himself, the loud-mouthed extrovert who blustered and stormed and was so transparently obvious as to arouse no question as to his motives. A self-seeker, a power-mad, would-be dictator, a local farm boy with mud on his boots and dirt in his mouth. He had been called all that and more during his political rise to the Senate of the World Council. He was still called it and, in part, it was true. But only in part.

The entire truth was known only to himself.

A stewardess came down the aisle, a tall, well-formed negress, trim in her uniform of green and grey. She halted by his side. "Coffee, sir?"

"I think so." Rayburn stared through the window. It may have been imagination, but it seemed to him that the earth had lost some of its curvature. He said so, and the stewardess nodded.

"We are on the descent," she explained. "We should land in about an hour. Black or white, sir?"

"White, and with plenty of sugar." Idly he watched the woman take the rest of the orders, pleased that she had asked him first. It was a little thing, but power is built on little things. He called out as she approached his aide. "He'll take the same as myself."

"Yes, sir." She disappeared into the galley.

Gerald Waterman yawned and opened his eyes. He hadn't been asleep, despite appearances; he had long since learned that a man asleep is a man ignored. He liked being ignored. He also liked watching people when they thought they were unobserved. He yawned

again and sat upright as the stewardess returned with the coffee.

"Thank you, miss." He smiled as he accepted his cup. "When do we land?"

"In about an hour, sir."

"Thank you." Gerald knew quite well when they would land; he had asked only to impress on the others the fact that he had been asleep when Rayburn had asked the same thing. He sipped his coffee and stared out of the window at his side. "Did any of you see it?"

"See what?" Rayburn was abrupt.

"Murphy's rocket. I've heard that sometimes, at this height, you can see it if you look at just the right place at the right time."

"I doubt it." Nagati looked up from his book with a faint air of superiority. "Murphy's rocket went into orbit at a height of three planetary diameters when the final stage exploded. As the total rocket at that time was little more than a hundred feet long it wouldn't be readily visible. I doubt if you could see it at all unless it reflected sunlight in exactly our direction."

"That's what I said." Gerald craned his neck as he stared through the window. "You've got to be in the right place at the right time."

"Murphy was a fool," said Rayburn. "His flight was a waste of time and money. No one will ever get to the Moon."

"Prosper doesn't agree with you, senator." Gerald gave up trying to see the invisible and concentrated on his coffee. "He hopes to go even further than that."

"To Venus." Rayburn sneered. "I've heard about his Aphrodite Project, but the man's a fool. At his age he should have more sense." He didn't say so, but it was clear that he thought anyone who shared Prosper's dream shared his stupidity. Gerald didn't argue.

Even now, after five years with the senator, he didn't really know whether he admired the man or not. Rayburn was an enigma. Sometimes he was the shouting loud-mouth, full of wind and devoid of apparent sense, at others he was shrewd and calculating with a computor for a brain and a stone for a heart. Gerald both admired him for having climbed to power, and despised him for the use he made of it.

Nationalism had died on a day, ninety years ago, when the World Council had drawn the teeth of the warring nations, but Rayburn wouldn't accept that. Instead of

working for the new Cosmopolitanism, the creed of brotherly love and mutual aid, he clung stubbornly to old-fashioned ideas of patriotism and restricted loyalties.

If it hadn't been so ludicrous it would have been pathetic, his clinging to the concept that, because a man happened to have been born in a certain locality, he should revere it above all others. As ludicrous as the idea that, because of accident of birth, a man should regard the colour of his skin and the language he spoke as being superior to all others. To Cosmopolitans it was obvious that the world belonged to all men everywhere and could not, and should not, be split into tiny regions. They dreamed of the day when the final vestiges of nationalism would be swept away, the old boundaries forgotten and all men united into a composite whole. The alternative, as had so often been demonstrated in the past, led only to war.

And war was something no sane man could contemplate without shuddering revulsion. For people died in time of war, and with modern methods of destruction no one could tell just who would be the victims.

And no one wanted to die and so lose immortality.

Rayburn least of all.

He sat in his seat, his big hands gripping the arm rests, his square, solid, farm-worker's face set in an ugly assortment of crags and hollows. He was sweating, little streams of perspiration trickling from his thin, long white hair. Irritably he mopped his face and neck, annoyed with himself for his weakness.

He was sixty-five years of age and had lived a hard life. He had burned himself out in his drive for power, and the electrocardiograms showed that his heart was no longer the efficient machine of old. Life, normal life, was running out and the other sort of life, that granted by the serum, would be lost if he waited too long. The treatment had to be taken before the body was too weak and even then it was a gamble. Two per cent. of those taking it failed to survive, but that was a normal gamble. What wasn't a gamble was the cold certainty that, if he took the treatment, his power would vanish as if it were a dream.

And there was so much to do before he lost that hard-won power.

He stiffened as a thin whining began to penetrate the cabin, then relaxed as the stewardess, busy

collecting the empty coffee cups, called the usual warning.

"Fasten your safety belts, please. We are about to enter the lower atmosphere."

Rayburn's hands felt like wood as he fumbled with the straps, his fingers stiff on the buckles. Across the aisle Nagati closed his book, adjusted his straps and touched the diplomatic bag between his feet before settling back against the cushions. Rayburn glanced at Sucamari, then looked up, half in anger, as Gerald, with smooth efficiency, fastened the webbing over chest and thighs. He swallowed the anger; the young fool was only trying to be helpful, but he wished that he didn't feel so old.

He fought the concept, annoyed with himself for yielding to it. He was tired, yes. It had been a long double-journey and the tropical sun had sapped his vigour, but not old. He couldn't be old. There was still too much to do.

The plane tilted a little and the whining rose to a shrill scream of displaced air as the stratoliner dropped towards the city below.

III

ANGELO AUGUSTINE WAS A local courier employed by the World Council. Every morning he

rose, washed, dressed, kissed his wife, ate a small meal, said goodbye to his dependants and joined the mad rush on the moving ways. For eight hours he worked at his job, which, despite the grandiose title, was little more than being a general messenger and glorified errand boy. Every evening he battled his way home, kissed his wife, ate another small meal and then spent the evening quietly watching television.

Sometimes he altered the routine in that, instead of watching television, he went to the nearby tri-di theatre, sometimes alone, but usually with his wife, Clarissa. At other times he amused himself by making tiny wooden models of sailing ships and, at others, he shut himself away with a battered typewriter. At such times he said that he was writing a book.

He had followed the same routine for forty years. A small, patient, ordinary-seeming man who obeyed the fifth commandment, religiously paid his insurance and appeared all that he was supposed to be. Appearances can be deceptive. His family would have been surprised to learn that he had a highly efficient knowledge of Oriental languages, a knowledge expensively acquired by hypnotic tuition. They would have been shocked to learn that

he had the habit of reading supposedly confidential documents and that, at irregular times, he posted reports of his activities to a box number somewhere on the East Side.

Angelo Augustine was a very efficient spy.

Messengers at the Council building waited in a comfortable room for any demands on their services. There weren't many of them, and all had been checked, counter-checked, tried and tested for utter loyalty and discretion. The World Council was not a single government but a collection of governments, each nation or area sending its own representatives, some of whom lived in the official quarters provided, the majority preferring to reside in their own consulates or private houses.

Communications between nations and representatives, or senators and members of their staff, did not go through normal channels. The diplomatic bag, the courier, the special messenger and the uniformed errand boy still had their place in the scheme of things.

A voice echoed from a speaker and the three messengers waiting in the room listened to instructions.

"Messenger for the French

legation. Messenger for the German legation."

Angelo relaxed as the two other men rose, brushed themselves down and left the room. Five minutes passed. A young man entered, lit a cigarette and sat down with a glossy magazine. He remembered something, rose, crossed the room and pressed a button beneath the speaker.

"Baylis reporting," he said. "Available for duty." He released the button and returned to his chair. He looked at Angelo, who didn't offer to start a conversation, then buried himself in his magazine. Ten minutes later the speaker came to life.

"Messenger for the Australian legation," said the controller; then, as Angelo rose and headed towards the door. "Messenger for the Japanese legation."

"Hell." Baylis dropped his magazine. "My luck!" He looked hopefully at the older man. "How about swapping, Angelo?" he said hopefully. "I'll do the Aussie and you take the Nip."

"No," said Angelo. A good spy is never too eager.

"Why not?" said Baylis. He became confidential. "Look, there's a girl in the Japanese legation I don't want to see. You know how it is." He was both

good looking and conceited, and his feminine conquests had done nothing to diminish his self-opinion. He caught at Angelo's arm. "Do me a favour, pal," he urged. "Make the swap and help me out. Hell, what difference does it make, anyway?"

"All right," said Angelo indifferently. A good spy is never too backward. And Baylis was right in what he said; it made no real difference which messenger did what.

The Japanese legation was on the ninety-eighth floor. Angelo waited for the elevator, mounted, walked down a carpeted corridor to an office marked with the national emblem of Japan. He knocked, waited, knocked again and entered the office. It was empty.

A good spy never acts out of character. It was in character for a messenger to enter an empty office. It was even in character, though not wise if he wanted to retain his job, for him to be a little curious. It was not in character for him to read the documents scattered over the desk, rifle the waste-paper basket or to peer into the filing cabinets. Angelo did none of these things. He merely waited, patiently, in the centre of the room.

The girl who joined him a

few minutes later was both beautiful and worried. Her high cheekbones and almond eyes were accentuated by her Occidental clothing. She stared at Angelo, registering her disappointment.

"You sent for a messenger, madam?" Angelo, though he was curious, did not betray his curiosity. It was obvious that the girl had hoped to see someone else. It was equally obvious that that someone else was the handsome Baylis.

"Messenger?" The girl blinked, then recovered. "Yes, of course." She stared around the office in search of something to justify her summons. Had the messenger been Baylis there would have been no need for such camouflage; they would have been too busy talking. To summon Baylis by name was something which, at the moment, she dared not do. The World Council building was a gigantic sounding board for rumour and scandal, and if the truth were to come out the young man would lose his job. With the labour situation as it was that would be a tragedy. She had every intention of forcing Baylis to marry her, but an unemployed husband is also a bad father. She had to get rid of Angelo and summon another messenger, and then another until Baylis answered

the summons. But how to get rid of the old man?

"I have a parcel I want you to deliver for me," she said quickly. She opened a drawer in the desk and took out the package. It was a large, square box and was heavily wrapped in tough, waterproof plastic. It bore no label or address. "You will deliver it to the Asian antique shop on Park Avenue, New Jersey. That is all."

"Yes, madam." Angelo picked up the parcel, a little surprised at its weight, and left the office. He checked out of the building and was heading towards the 42nd Street substrip terminal when he bumped into Sam Falkirk. The captain nodded towards the parcel.

"Hello, Angelo, shopping?"

"Just a delivery job." Angelo adjusted the parcel beneath his arm. "Carmen was asking after you, Sam. When can we expect you around at the house?" Carmen was Angelo's daughter, a market research worker who sometimes called at the statistical department of the World Council, and the messenger had secret hopes of Sam becoming his son-in-law.

"As soon as I get some time to call my own," said Sam. "Just at the moment, what with school lecture duties and making sure that none of the visitors run off

with the fittings or try to smuggle bombs into the assembly chamber, I'm pretty busy."

"Bombs?"

"That's what I said. Ever since Rayburn got back from Hainan he's been beating the nationalist drum for all it's worth. One day some fanatical Cosmopolitan is going to try and shut him up the hard way." Sam grinned, but his eyes were serious. Assassination was, as always, a very real danger to those in the public eye.

"Maybe it would be a good idea at that," said Angelo thoughtfully. "I've listened to Rayburn and sometimes he gives me the creeps. The trouble is a lot of people believe in him and won't hear a word against him." He adjusted the parcel again. "Well, I'd better get on with the job. Any message?"

"For Carmen?" Sam shrugged. "I don't think so. Just give her my regards and tell her that I'll be calling for a date as soon as I get time."

Angelo nodded and walked towards the terminal. As usual, it was crowded, the underground moving ways jammed with an almost solid mass of bodies. Angelo dropped his coin in the turnstile, walked down the ramp to the stationary strip and, holding the parcel in both hands, waited

for a clear spot on the five-mile eastbound strip. He saw one, jumped onto the flexible belt and shoved his way across to the next, five miles an hour faster. Again he made the change and leaned on the safety rail as the strip carried him eastwards at fifteen miles an hour.

The strips were uncomfortable but they had partly solved the problem of inter-city transportation. Only partly; nothing could ever wholly solve the continual movement of twenty million people crammed into an area only designed for a third of that number. A hundred years ago the problem had been acute, and since then had grown steadily worse. The substrips had done more than anything else to ease it. They weren't too fast, but they were continuous, and they had been built at a time when a man could literally walk through the city faster than he could drive through the jammed streets.

Angelo closed his eyes as he felt the dampness of artificial mist. It was the cloud-screen of a flashad and his defence was automatic. Not that it did much good; any surface served as a screen for the sub-threshold commands. He opened his eyes as a sexy female voice whispered in his ear.

"Buy Snapbread," it urged.

"Buy Snapbread. Buy Snapbread." The voice faded as he passed out of range. Other speakers would repeat the same message in a strong masculine voice so as to appeal to both sections of the public. Angelo, like most travellers exposed to the nuisance, had developed a high sales resistance to the whisper-speakers, but he could never be quite sure that, in consciously not buying Snapbread, he was doing just what the advertiser wanted. Many irritant ads were put out by competing firms for rival products on the theory that what one didn't sell the other would.

The only real defence against advertising was for a man to be both blind and deaf.

Warning lights told of the approach of a junction and Angelo crossed the strips, changing to the one which led under the Hudson. It dipped, levelled, then rose again as it reached the New Jersey shore.

There, Angelo left it. His excuse, had he been observed, was innocent enough. He went to a men's room, fed coins into a slot and closed himself in a cubicle. Alone and safe from observation he got to work.

The outer wrapping of the parcel was a common heat-sealing

plastic and it yielded to the urgings of a thin-bladed knife. Inside was a strong corrugated container lined with floss and holding a carved and ornamented box of ivory inlaid with mother of pearl. Angelo removed it, his fingers searching the surface for some means to open it. A spring yielded beneath his thumb and the lid sprang open. Inside the box, nested in more floss, rested a dull brown statue.

It was a statue of Buddha, about eight inches high, six wide and three thick. It was elaborately carved, but the finish seemed poor. Angelo removed it from the box, stood it on the floor and removed the floss. He inspected the container, checked everything for writing or other contents and then replaced the inner floss exactly as he had found it. Puzzled, he stared at the statue.

He was a spy, and a good one, which meant that he reported exactly what he saw and heard without trying to interpret the information. He gave the circumstances in which he had learned it, but that was all. And he knew that it was not for him to judge the relative merits of any imparted information. He could not make such a judgment. Angelo had no enemies and no cause. He did what he did for money and, if

he thought about it at all, he merely wondered what possible use all the odd scraps and items he posted to the East Side box number could be.

But his instructions were clear; anything and everything dealing in the remotest fashion with the Orient. This parcel came under that heading and he would report it, but the report would be all the better for more details. And why should the girl in the Japanese legation send a statue to a shop which, undoubtedly, would have a cupboard full of assorted Buddhas? And if they wanted more they could always obtain them through the usual channels.

Unless there was something very special about this particular statue.

Angelo was a realist, he was a spy because he needed the money, and his mind turned immediately to the possibility of smuggling. Carefully, he picked up the figure and examined it for possible hollowness, hidden plugs or other devices. It was opaque and it was hard to tell if it were hollow or not, but the weight suggested that it was solid. Inevitably he thought of opium.

He had never used the narcotic, but his hypnotic education had included details as to appearance and taste. The statue could have

been made from the poppy derivative and either carved or pressed into shape. If that were the case the mystery was solved, for such an amount of opium would be worth a fortune on the underworld drug market.

Carefully, Angelo lifted the statue and licked at the underside of the base. The surface felt slick and cold, something like the shell of an egg. He licked harder and this time was rewarded by a distinct taste. It was a blend of something between chocolate and raw meat and, whatever it was, it wasn't opium. He discovered that his tongue had left a slight depression on the surface. To cover it, he licked the base of the statue equally all over, then blew on the surface to dry it.

The examination had taken longer than he thought and he hurried as he repacked the parcel. The statue was made of some hard material coated with a softer film. The carving was too elaborate for the basic material to be soft, and the fuzzy finish proved the existence of a softer coating. So much he knew, but that was all he knew and all he could report.

Heating the blade of his knife he re-sealed the outer plastic, then swore as the keen blade slipped and nicked the ball of

his thumb. The pain or the injury didn't worry him, but he didn't want to get blood on the wrapping. He examined it as he sucked the minor wound. No blood. The parcel, superficially, was exactly as he had received it.

Leaving the men's room he returned to the substrip and continued his journey to the Hudson terminal at the point where Broadway met Park Avenue. He checked the number of the Asian Antique shop from a vid book in a public booth and found it was about halfway down the avenue. He hesitated by a short-drop bus stop, noticed the queue and decided that it would be quicker to walk.

Halfway towards his destination someone stole the parcel.

It was quickly and neatly done. Angelo felt someone bump into him, and, at the same time, the parcel shot forward from beneath his arm. The thief ran forward, caught it before it hit the ground and darted into the crowd of pedestrians.

After him ran Angelo.

He was no longer a young man, but he was still fit and he dived after the thief yelling for him to stop. The thief didn't stop. He didn't even look back, but wriggled between the pedestrians, the par-

cel gripped in both hands, his head bent and his shoulders hunched as he ran towards a maze of sidestreets leading from the river. A few people stared after him and one or two made an effort to follow. They soon gave up. Thieving was common and most criminals didn't hesitate to hit out when in danger of capture. Sometimes they were armed, and no one, in this day and age, wanted to get hurt or killed. They had too much to lose.

Angelo forced himself through the crowd intent on recovering the parcel. Personally, it didn't really affect him, but his pride as a messenger wouldn't let him give up without making an effort. He dived down an alley, caught a glimpse of the thief vanishing around a corner, threw himself in pursuit and swore as he found himself doubling back to the main street.

The exertion was telling on him, and his heart thudded against his ribs and the breath rasped in his throat as he merged with the crowd. He saw a flurry of movement at an intersection and a familiar figure darted across the avenue just as the lights changed colour. He was about to follow when a hand gripped his arm.

"Hold it!" The policeman jerked him backwards as a car swept past

with a hum from its turbine.
"You wanna get yourself killed?"

"My parcel." Angelo fought for breath as he tried to explain.
"I've got to recover that parcel."

"Been robbed?" The policeman stared to where Angelo pointed. He could see nothing but the stream of traffic and the normal crowds. He shrugged and turned to the messenger. "Nothing I can do, mister. Be more careful next time."

"I . . ." Angelo gasped and pressed his hand to his chest as pain tore at his heart. The cop stared at him, his face suddenly anxious.

"What's the matter, mister? You ill or something?"

Angelo couldn't answer.

IV

JOE LEGHORN WASN'T SURPRISED at the knock on the door; he'd been expecting it for three days now, but he took his time answering it just the same. He opened the door just as his landlord was about to beat again on the panel. Learhy blinked, looking foolish with his hand lifted as if to beat against empty air.

"You woke me up," accused Joe. "What do you want?"

"The rent." Learhy was a man who came straight to the point.
"You owe me for three days now. You got it?"

"No."

"I thought not." Learhy stepped into the room. "All right, Joe, collect your stuff and get out of here."

"Now wait a minute," pleaded Joe. "Just give me a little more time and I'll pay you in full. Hell, man, you know how it is in my business. One day you haven't got it, the next you have. You know?"

"I know." Learhy jerked his head towards the door. "Out."

"Just two days, Learhy." Joe was getting desperate. "Just two days. I've got something cooking that's going to pay off big. You'll get your money."

"I'd better." Learhy touched the tin badge which made a bright spot on his lapel. "You try to gyp me, Joe, and I'll appeal to the Association. I don't pay protection for nothing."

"I won't gyp you." Joe had tangled with the Landlords' Protection Association before and they played rough. He forced himself to smile. "You'll give me some time?"

"One day." Learhy sucked at his bad teeth. "You pay the rent by this time tomorrow or you

go out on your car. And don't try to sneak your stuff out. If you don't come across with the cash I'm keeping it." He touched the badge again, scowled at his tenant, then went stumping down the stairs. Joe started to slam the door, thought better of it and closed it quietly instead. Tiredly, he sat on the rumpled bed and stared at the place he had called home for the past two years.

It wasn't much, just an eight by five cubicle, but it had its own door and its own ceiling light and gave a certain degree of privacy. The walls were of hardboard painted a dull, uninspired brown. A tall Perbox stood in one corner like an old-fashioned coffin and a rickety chair filled in at the foot of the bed. There were no windows; ventilation was provided by a grille over the door. The door itself could be opened by a kid with a hairpin, but that didn't matter. It took the pattern of his thumb to open the Perbox, and no one in their right mind would leave anything of value lying around. That's what the personal boxes were for.

The couple next door had fallen silent when Learhy had banged on the door; now they resumed their eternal arguments in penetrating whispers. He did night work; she didn't work at all.

He wanted to get some sleep; she didn't see any fun in sitting around all day watching a man snore. He wanted to know why the hell she didn't get herself a job; she wanted to know just what kind of a woman he took her for. Such arguments usually ended in a screaming fight.

From the room to the other side came the fretful whining of a hungry child. Both whispers and whining were normal; when every word could be overheard people grew into the habit of whispering, and hunger was simply a part of growing up.

Irritably, Joe jabbed his thumb against the lock of the Perbox and took out his toilet articles. For a change the washroom was empty and he showered, shaved with depilatory cream, combed his thinning hair and rinsed out his spare shirt and underwear. The synthetic fabric was advertised to dry within five minutes and, with the help of the hot-air dryer, he managed to stay within four minutes of that time. The manufacturers must have used a blast furnace in order to justify their claim.

From his lodgings, habit carried him to the sleazy self-serve restaurant where he usually ate. A dollar bought him a half-pint of

coffee in a paper cup and freedom to sit at one of the tables. Another bought him a shot of low-grade brandy from the alky dispenser. It wasn't good coffee, and the raw spirit which gave it flavour would have insulted any Frenchman, but it was the best he could afford.

Wedging his way between a fat man dressed in a conservative suit of maroon edged with yellow piping and a pale-faced com-sec chewing on a sandwich, Joe sipped his normal breakfast and stared at the two-hundred-inch telly screen hanging against one wall.

The item then showing was a flash from the assembly chamber of the World Council. Senator Sucamari was proposing a motion that the Calcutta project be given top priority. Senator Rayburn was opposing the motion. The scene seemed to annoy the fat man.

"Damn Chinks," he snorted. "They're nothing but a lot of bloodsucking leeches. First that big plant on Hainan; now they want to spend twice as much on another at Calcutta. It should be stopped."

"Indians ain't Chinks," said Joe.

"What's the difference?" de-

manded the fat man. "They aren't white, are they?"

"Nothing wrong in providing food," said Joe. "Maybe you've never been hungry."

"I've worked for every mouthful of food I've ever eaten," snapped the fat man. "I don't believe in charity, and neither does Rayburn. We can't be expected to keep pouring out money for the benefit of backward peoples. The Asiatics should look after themselves."

"Sure," said Joe. He didn't want an argument. "You got a cigarette?"

"Never touch them," said the fat man. "Now what this country needs is a strong man at the head who can tell these Chinks where to get off. It's time we began worrying about ourselves a little more and the world in general a little less."

"Rayburn say that?" Joe lit a cigarette, one of his last. He ignored the expression on the fat man's face.

"He did. Say, what made you ask for a cigarette when you've got some?"

"Absent minded," said Joe. "I don't remember things so good before breakfast."

"Breakfast?" The fat man looked startled. "It's well past noon."

"That's right." Joe put down his empty cup. "Breakfast time." Drawing on his cigarette, he returned his attention to the screen.

The newsfax boys had decided that the World Council had had enough free publicity and had switched over to a sponsored beauty contest. The girls, long legged, scantily dressed and superbly shaped, paraded across the screen in a blaze of colour, posturing and showing their teeth in exaggerated smiles. The smiles were important; the sponsor manufactured toothpaste.

Beauty was followed by humour. Prosper had managed to scrape up enough money to buy a minute of screen time in order to beg funds for his Aphrodite Project. His lined face with its bagged eyes surmounted by a ruff of white hair gave him the appearance of an intelligent dog. A background shot showed the rocket, still in the skeletal stage, lying on a stretch of desert. Both Prosper and his rocket were a joke and he was faded out during the second repeat of his address while the cameras gave a fifteen-second flash of the mess a Blue had made when he'd jumped from the top of a three-hundred-storey building to spatter on the concrete below.

There was no comment as to the reasons which had made a potential immortal take his own life.

Joe didn't even think about it. He was engrossed with his own worries. Learhy had meant exactly what he had said; either Joe scraped up some money today or tomorrow he would be dispossessed and probably beaten up as well. He sighed as he thought about it, almost wishing that he had a regular job. He had never taken to the idea of steady employment, preferring to use his dubious talents on various get-rich-quick schemes which, somehow, had all failed to be as profitable as they should. Joe, in short, was a drifter, a petty criminal and a human parasite. He was forty years of age, looked fifty, and had known various degrees of poverty all his life.

He grunted and looked up as something hard jabbed against his ribs. The house cop, billy in hand, stared pointedly at Joe's empty cup.

"You finished, bud?"

"Just finished."

"Then buy more or beat it." The cop let his club thud softly against his thigh. "You know the rules; no loitering." He slapped the plastic tube against his leg again; he seemed to like the sound

and feel. "Nothing personal, you understand, but that's the way it's got to be. Some guys think they can sit in here all day for the price of a coffee." The club reached towards the man in the maroon suit. The com-sec had already left, hurrying back to her machine and the endless tapes she punched out for the computers. "That goes for you, too, fatso. Buy more or get moving and make room for others."

"I'm going." The fat man heaved himself to his feet and waddled from the restaurant. Joe, taking his time, sauntered to the change booth and cracked his last remaining bill into coins. He hesitated by the alky dispenser, then decided against another shot. He wanted the alcohol but couldn't afford it. He compromised by paying twice as much for a package of cigarettes, lit one and walked out into the street.

The area around the restaurant was a poor one, a collection of tumble-down brownstone houses converted by flimsy walls and sagging doors into a rabbit-warren of man-made slums. The streets were full of children screaming and yelling as they played in the gutter. Older children, too grown-up for play, too young for work, lounged on steps and

against walls, little knots of them huddled around dice and card games. Every window had a small window-box containing a tired mass of vegetation, mostly perpetual spinach with sometimes a few carrots or broccoli to break the monotony. But no flowers. You can't eat flowers.

Joe hated the neighbourhood. He hated the smell of garbage, of cooking, of too many people living in too small an area. He had grown up in such an environment and his hope and dream was that, one day, he would be able to break away from it. It was a dream which had kept him single. Who wanted to be saddled with a wife and kids? The same dream had sent him running from his family as soon as he was old enough to make his own way. He wanted to make a fresh start and one day he would do it. Everything was in his favour; no dependent Blues to support, no wife, no kids, nothing. When his big chance came he was ready to grab it with both hands.

But he wished that it wasn't so long in coming.

A public videophone booth stood on the corner. Joe shut himself in, fed coins into the slot and dialed a number. The screen flashed with colour and cleared to reveal a woman's face.

"Ajax Service Agency. Can——" She broke off as she recognised him. "Hello, Joe."

"Hello, Margie. Got anything for me?"

"Some mail, all circulars." Margie owned a share-office and ran a twenty-four hour service taking messages, collecting mail, typing letters and providing an address to all the drifters who needed an office but couldn't afford one. Joe was listed as a trouble-shooter, a category which meant nothing but that he was willing to sell his services to anyone who needed them.

"Nothing else? Didn't Fred leave word for me?"

"Fred Wolfe?" Margie shook her head. "I haven't heard from Fred in almost a week."

"Hell!" Fred was a small-time operator who sold low-grade protection on a take-it-or-else basis to owners of Blue-staffed sweat shops. Sometimes he needed help and Joe had been relying on him. "All right, Margie," he said. "So there's nothing doing. Thanks, anyway." He was about to cut the connection when she remembered something.

"The rent, Joe," she reminded. "It's due tomorrow. Don't forget it."

"I won't." The screen turned blank on his scowl. Margie was

like Learhy; she got her office rent or didn't provide an office. And without an office he couldn't stay in business.

Leaving the booth, he headed for the substrip terminal. Hanging around an area where poverty was the rule was a waste of time. No one had anything and there were a dozen applicants for every opportunity. To get money he had to go where money was, and it was worth the fifty cents needed for the ride into town.

He left the substrip at the New Lincoln terminal and headed directly towards a coke dispenser. He wasn't really thirsty and he normally didn't touch the soft drink, but he'd fallen victim to a flashad and, for some reason he didn't know, he craved for a nice Coke. He wasn't alone. A half-dozen other travellers joined him, each eager to press money in the slot of the dispenser.

After the drink, Joe wandered up and down Park Avenue, staring enviously into the shops and at the expensively dressed customers. The Undersea Bureau had a double-display of submarine produce, dried kelp, molluscs, strange plants and other products of the underwater farms. Joe stared at a schematic of one of the domes, wondering what it

was like to live in an inverted eggshell and go to work wearing diving dress.

"Interested?" A man in a sea-green and silver uniform smiled at him from the door. "We've a few spots open for willing workers. Three year contract, all found and five dollars a day spending money. How about it?"

"No thanks."

"Think again," urged the man. "A new farm down off the coast of Florida. Plenty of sunlight and plenty of shore leave." He stepped forward and lowered his voice. "Full recreation, too, get me?" His wink and nudge were expressive.

"What's the working depth?" said Joe then, as the man hesitated. "Not that it matters. I've got a bad pump and couldn't pass the medical."

"You don't look a heart case," said the man. "Tell you what I'll do. You sign up and, if the medical flunks you, you keep the retainer. Is it a deal?"

"I'll think about it." Joe had no intention of accepting the offer. There was nothing wrong with his heart, but even if there was, the medic would still have passed him. Life in the domes was tough, though, from what he had heard, a smart man with the right connections could clean up if he had

a way with cards and dice. Gambling was the main recreation of the undersea workers, and most of them finished their contract time as broke as when they'd first signed on.

Thinking about money reminded him of why he was here. Picking a discarded newspaper from a trash basket, he walked down to the National Bank and concentrated on business.

People are creatures of habit. When a man draws money from a bank he will invariably count it, even though the teller has already done it twice before his eyes. Usually a man will hesitate to re-count it right away; most of them do it while on their way from the counter, holding the cash in their hands and satisfying themselves as to the amount. Some are slower than others, some more careless or perhaps simply in a hurry.

Joe was waiting for someone who would still be holding his money when he emerged into the street. When that happened he intended to make a quick snatch-and-run, trusting to luck and the crowds to make good his getaway. The newspaper was merely for camouflage and to hide his features.

It was a good plan and might

even have worked had circumstances been just right, but Joe, looking in his rumpled suit of green and orange checks like a shop-soiled parrot, attracted too much attention. A bank guard saw him leaning against the wall reading his newspaper. A half an hour later he was still there. The guard, employed to be suspicious, walked over and jerked his thumb.

"On your way, mister."

"What's with you?" Joe was annoyed. He folded the newspaper so as to hide the peephole he had made, stuck it in his pocket and glared at the guard. "The bank own the street now?"

"No. It just doesn't like people hanging about outside. Just move someplace else, that's all."

"I'm waiting for a friend," said Joe stubbornly, but he recognised defeat. No matter how the argument turned out he was beaten. If he insisted on staying the guard would watch him like a hawk; if he moved too far away his chance of a snatch-and-run would be lost. Cursing the guard and his luck in general, he crossed the avenue to the other side.

And saw Angelo with his parcel.

What followed then was automatic. Joe didn't recognise Angelo's uniform as belonging to

the World Council, but he did recognise it as a uniform. To Joe, a uniformed messenger in this area meant money, a shop employee with a parcel of goods sent on approval, a servant of the idle rich, a chauffeur perhaps picking up some expensive item. It had to be expensive. Park Avenue didn't specialise in low-cost items. Whatever it was, it would be valuable.

And Joe was desperate for money.

His shoulder bumped into the messenger at the same moment as the heel of his hand slammed against the parcel, knocking it forward. Two quick steps and he was off, the parcel in his hands and his face unseen by the man he had robbed. The rest was routine; a quick wriggle through the crowd and into a side street, down which he raced like a scalded cat. Then, doubling back into the avenue where the crowd would shield him from view.

Luck was with him and he managed to cross the avenue just before the road became clogged with traffic. Safe on the far side, he dropped to a fast walk, looking like a man with an errand and with little time to spare. After a quarter of a mile he relaxed, smiling with success.

He lost the smile as a hand fell on his shoulder.

IT WAS A BIG HAND, ORNAMENTED with rings, and it belonged to a plump, smiling man dressed in flaming reds and yellows so that he resembled an old-time clown. He chuckled at Joe's expression.

"Now, now, my friend," he said. "No need to be alarmed. Not when the Spot Quiz is offering you the opportunity to win the magnificent prize of one million dollars." He rolled the words as if he liked the taste. "One million dollars, friend, and all yours if you can answer five simple questions. Now, just step this way and try for a fortune."

Joe relaxed. The Spot Quiz was the biggest thing since soaring prizes and a series of nervous breakdowns among the contenders had put the old-fashioned double-or-quits contests out of favour. The procedure was simple; a recording van selected a site, a passer-by was approached and the fun began.

"Hurry, friend." The Quiz Master was impatient. "Let's not waste time. Just step before the cameras and let's see if you're going to be the winner of that big, beautiful, million-dollar prize."

Joe stepped forward. To any criminal a crowd offers the best hiding place, and no one around

could know that the parcel he carried wasn't his own. And there was always the chance that he might win. If he did, he would be the first one. The Spot Quiz was tough; no one had ever walked off with the prize, and the betting was that no one ever would. But there was no harm in trying. He smiled as he faced the cameras.

"Your name, friend?" The genial Quiz Master pointed a directional mike towards Joe's lips. It was out of range of the cameras and his own throat mike was hidden beneath a flowing cravat. The Spot Quiz took pains to appear natural.

"Joe Leghorn." The reply was automatic.

"And your employment?"

"Trouble-shooter. I'm in the book." There was, Joe thought, no harm in trying for a little free advertising.

"So you're a trouble-shooter, Joe. That means that if anyone is in trouble they can hire you to get them out of it. Right?"

"That's right," said Joe. "I'm licensed, too."

"Of course. And how long have you been helping your fellow men?"

"Twenty years," said Joe quickly. "And I've never failed a client yet. I . . ."

"Good. Good." The Quiz Master had a voice like thick cream. "Very interesting, I'm sure. Well, you know the rules, Joe. Just answer five consecutive questions correctly, and within five seconds of asking, and you will walk away from here with a certified cheque for one million dollars." He held the outsized cheque so that Joe could see it. "Nice, isn't it?"

"I'll say so." Joe's mouth watered at the thought of what he could do with a million dollars.

"Now for the first question, Joe, an easy one I'm sure. The first question is this. Which organisation had its headquarters on the site now occupied by the World Council?" The plump man smiled. "You know the answer to that one, don't you?" He stressed the first two words.

"UNO," gasped Joe.

"Correct! The United Nations Organisation was taken over and incorporated into the World Council. Now for question number two. The second question, Joe, is this. The penalty for murder is the same as for crippling mayhem. What is it?"

"Forced labour for the full term of natural life," said Joe. He knew the answer to that one.

"And longevity treatment refused," he added quickly.

"Again correct! Now, Joe, listen carefully to the next question. The third question is this. If it is 12.00 hours here in New York, what is the time in London, England?"

"Uh?" Joe blinked, his mind racing. He knew that the time was different, just as it was between New York and San Francisco, and he guessed it was about the same. But was it forward or back? He took a chance. "Seventeen hundred hours."

"And for the third time correct!" The Quiz Master seemed bursting with joy at the prospect of having to hand over the million-dollar prize. "Three questions answered and two to go. Two more correct answers, Joe, and you can take home that great, big, wonderful cheque for a million dollars. Are you married, Joe?"

"No."

"With a million dollars to spend I bet that you won't stay single for long." The plump man gave a deep belly laugh. "Speaking of marriage, Joe, what is the waiting period for divorce in this state?"

"Three . . ." Joe paused. The question was the waiting period for *divorce*, not marriage. He had almost fallen into the trap. "Six

weeks," he said. "From time of application to dissolution."

"Wonderful! Again correct!" The Quiz Master reacted as if Joe had just told him the answer to the riddle of the Sphinx. "Four questions answered, Joe, and only one to go for that one million dollars. For the last question, Joe, the one which may make you a millionaire." Deliberately he paused so as to build up the tension. "Give the exact definition of a parsec." He began counting off the seconds. "One... Two... Three..."

"A part of a second," said Joe desperately. He didn't know the answer, but anything was better than remaining silent. The Quiz Master with his damn counting didn't give a man a chance to think, and the crowds pressing around weren't any help, either.

". . . Five!" The plump man looked regretful. "Sorry, Joe, but you've failed to answer the fifth and last question. A parsec is an astronomical unit of length corresponding to a parallax of one second of arc and is about three and one third light years. That was the answer I wanted, Joe, and that was the answer you didn't give."

"How the hell was I supposed to know that?" Joe felt furious.

He'd practically felt that cheque in his hands.

"Any astronomer would have known it," pointed out the Quiz Master. "And I'll bet that there are a dozen people in this audience who know it, too." He beamed at the crowd. "But, as a consolation prize, the sponsors of the Spot Quiz are giving you this voucher which may be exchanged at any store for five hundred dollars-worth of Miracle Maid Products." He handed Joe the voucher and turned to someone else in the crowd. "And now, you, madam, or is it miss? Your name is?"

Joe, forgotten, eased his way out of the crowd. He wasn't too disappointed; the voucher could be sold at most stores for half its face value, so the quiz hadn't been a total loss. And he still had the parcel.

Safe at home he examined it, cursing at what he found. It wasn't jewels, perfume, gold or silver ware, all of which he could have disposed of with a minimum of effort at a good profit. Instead, it was just a lousy statue in a trick box. Disgustedly, Joe sat down on the bed and stared at it.

Elementary caution had dictated the wearing of gloves when he opened the parcel; he didn't want to cover the contents with

his fingerprints, nor did he want to dust his hands with any skin-ink powder it might have contained. Valuable parcels were often trapped with the powder, which turned purple on contact with the skin. A suspect would have a hard job explaining away stained hands. Now he sat and examined his find, turning the Buddha over in his gloved hands as he tried to estimate its worth.

He was still examining it when Learhy walked into the room.

The landlord was a little drunk and inclined to be argumentative. He glared at the wrapping, the box and the statue, and immediately became suspicious.

"So I was right," he said. "I guessed that you'd try and pull a fast one. Now I catch you packing up ready to sneak out while owing me the rent. Well, we'll see about that." He made a grab for the box, then swore as Joe knocked aside his arm.

"Lay off," said Joe. With money in his pocket he could afford to be independent. "I'm not clearing out, though it would serve you right if I did. No one but a fool would pay the rent you ask for this rat trap." He returned the statue to the box, snapped shut the lid and re-wrapped it. "Got any money?"

"Money?" Learhy looked blank.

"That's what I said. Real money, the kind you carry in your pocket." Joe held out the voucher. "This is worth at least two-fifty. Take what I owe you and give me the change."

"You kidding?" Learhy took the voucher, held it up to the light and pursed his lips in a soundless whistle as he checked the watermark. "This is genuine."

"Sure it's genuine." Joe glared his impatience. "Are you going to cash it for me, or do I take it someplace else?"

"How did you get it, Joe?" Learhy was suspicious.

"I won it." Joe reached for the voucher. "If you don't want it I'll find someone who does."

"I'll cash it," said Learhy hastily. He knew that he could squeeze three hundred for it from a storekeeper he knew. Slowly he counted out a sheaf of greasy notes. "What you got in the parcel, Joe?"

"Heirlooms." Joe picked up the money, counted it and tucked it into his empty wallet. "You interested in heirlooms, Learhy?"

"Not me," said the landlord. "Johanassen might be."

"That robber!"

"You could try somewhere else, but Johanassen's interested in most things." Learhy winked. "And

it's cash down and no questions."

"This stuff is legitimate."

"Sure." Learhy was quick to agree. "So it's legitimate. But try Johanasen, all the same."

A long time ago one of Johanasen's forebears had been born on the shores of the Baltic, but he had passed down little but his name. The present holder looked more Armenian than Norwegian, a big, fat, greasy-looking man with hooded eyes and a perpetually-stubbled chin. He was listed as a general dealer and ran a communal lodging house and soup kitchen in a rambling warehouse he owned. One corner of it was occupied by his business premises. He also ran a sweat shop and kept a dozen Blues busy twelve hours a day sorting junk and shredding rags, for which labour he paid them in bed and board. Sometimes one of his workers would quit the sweat shop, preferring to starve in the gutter or queue long hours for the government hand-out rather than work his fingers raw. Johanasen didn't mind; there were always plenty more Blues to make up the number.

He came to the counter of his shop as Joe pushed through the door and folded his meaty arms on the wood as he stared at the parcel.

"Hello, Joe," he greeted. "How's business?"

"I'm living." Joe put down the parcel and stared at the dealer. "What's the matter with your face?"

"The cuts?" Johanasen lifted one big hand and gently touched his cheek. "Had an argument with one of my dependents. She swung at me with a rake before taking off." He spat thoughtfully on the dirty floor. "Some people don't know the meaning of gratitude, Joe. They bite the hand that feeds them. But she'll be sorry. That I promise."

"Sure," said Joe. He knew all about the sweat shop and flop house. He could even guess the reason for the argument.

"Yes," said Johanasen softly. "She'll be sorry. I'll teach the bitch to show her claws. Goddamn Blues, you can't trust a one." He changed the subject. "Got a nice suit just come in, Joe. Real sharp. Fit you like a glove, cheap, too."

"Not interested, thanks all the same."

"No? Then what are you interested in?" Johanasen looked at the parcel. "Come on, Joe, open up."

Joe unwrapped the parcel. He was still wearing his gloves and

he kept them on as he opened the box. Johanasen stared expressionlessly at the Buddha.

"It's a real, genuine work of art," said Joe. "Worth a fortune to a museum or a collector." He had spent some time before coming to the dealer window shopping at antique shops. He had seen a set of carved ivory chessmen and the price had shocked him. If the box and the statue were worth only half that, then he was in gravy.

"Junk," said Johanasen.

"Like hell, it's junk!" Joe was indignant. "You don't pick up junk on Park Avenue." He bit his lips, realizing that he had said too much. "This is the real stuff. Look at that box, all carved and inlaid. You don't see work like that outside a museum, and you know it."

"Still junk," said the dealer. He made no move to touch the articles. "Why are you wearing gloves, Joe?"

"Hands are cold."

"Feet, too?"

"I don't get it." Joe frowned at the dealer. "It's cold outside."

Johanasen shrugged and, reaching under the counter, produced a pair of gloves and a jeweller's glass. He switched on an overhead light, donned the gloves and screwed the glass into his eye.

Carefully, he examined both the box and the statue.

"These things are clean," he said after a while. "No skin-ink, anyway. Did you expect the parcel to be trapped?"

"Of course not." Joe registered indignation. "Why should I?"

"I'm asking the questions, Joe."

"You're asking too many damn questions!" Joe was annoyed. He didn't like Johanasen, and he didn't like being played with cat and mouse. The dealer had a bad reputation; he was fond of buying stolen property from teenagers and then blackmailing them into obedience. One day he would wind up with a knife in his ribs. "I'm offering something for sale," said Joe. "You want it or not?"

"A hundred dollars."

"I'm getting deaf," said Joe. "I didn't hear that."

"You heard me." Johanasen flipped the box with the tip of one gloved finger. "Stuff like this has no value, not unless I know more about it."

"It's robbery!" Joe was disgusted. "Hell, I could walk into any hock shop and pledge it for five times what you offered."

"Then why don't you?" Johanasen straightened and replaced the jeweller's glass and gloves under the counter. "Go ahead, Joe, what's keeping you?"



He knew as well as Joe did what was keeping him. Hock shops were legitimate; the continual police inspections took care of that. Even if the contents of the parcel hadn't been wired around, and it was almost certain that they had, Joe would still have to thumbprint the receipt. As a registered trouble-shooter his prints were on file at police headquarters, and to attach his mark to a receipt for money received for stolen goods was only delaying the inevitable.

But he wasn't defeated yet. "So I can't take it to a hock shop. All right. But that doesn't mean I'm going to let you rob me. I'd rather dump the stuff in the river."

"That's silly." Johanasen shook his head. "That's really silly."

"Not to me it isn't." Joe reached out for the parcel. The dealer gripped his arm.

"Take it easy, Joe. You can maybe up the price with some information. Park Avenue, you said? Now why don't you tell me all about it?"

Joe sighed and told him.

Johanasen listened without change of expression. He knew as well as Joe that only the best was to be found on the Avenue,

and he knew, much better than Joe, the probable value of what he had. Ivory, real ivory, was scarce. The statue was open to doubt, but the colour was about right for old ivory, and there was no doubt as to the box itself. Lang Ki, down in Chinatown, would be willing to act as agent and sell the item to some rich collector who wouldn't be too curious.

"Tell you what I'll do," said Johanasen. "I'll give you two hundred and fifty and take a chance."

"You don't take chances," said Joe. "This thing is worth a lot more than that and you know it."

"It could be hot," reminded the dealer. "I could lose out on the deal."

"Not while you can dicker with the insurance companies." Joe reached towards the box. "Maybe I can make a deal with them myself."

"Relax, Joe." Johanasen produced a roll of bills, knowing how the actual sight of money will weaken a man's resolve. "Take the two fifty now and let me handle it. If I can pass it off without trouble and at a profit I'll cut you in for the same again. Is it a deal?"

It was the best he could get and Joe knew it. Sullenly he took the money, then hesitated, the notes in his hand.

"When will I know? About the extra, I mean."

"A few days; these things take time."

"I'll drop in tomorrow, just to remind you." Joe pocketed the money and stepped into the street. A woman passed him, head lowered and a bundle in her arms. The bundle was alive. Joe paused to light a cigarette and stared after her, wondering what it must be like to be a woman with a kid, broke and homeless, with no one to help and with winter just around the corner. Hell, he guessed, what with the worry and all. Shrugging, he walked down the street. It wasn't his business.

The Blue wasn't any of his business, either. The man had followed him from Johanasen's, hanging back like a dog, waiting, Joe knew, for the butt of his cigarette. A lot of people had fun that way with the Blues, leading them on and then, at the last minute, throwing the butt into a puddle or trampling it to unsalvagable ruin. Joe didn't act that way. Taking the cigarette from between his lips, he held it out to the Blue. The man looked

at it, then at Joe, his eyes reflecting his hunger.

"Go ahead," said Joe. "I won't bite."

"Thanks, mister." The Blue scuttled forward, lithe as a young man, and took the cigarette. He backed away as if expecting a kick.

Looking at him, Joe felt a touch of unaccustomed compassion. There, he thought, but for the grace of God, go I. He corrected himself. There, by the grace of God, I shall go. Father Rosen had taught him that when he had once dropped in at the mission for a hand-out. It was a sobering thought. He gave the man a dollar and headed for the nearest bar.

VI

SAM FALKIRK SAT AT HIS DESK and tried to convince himself that he was doing work of vital necessity and great responsibility. He didn't succeed. The necessity was there, he supposed; someone had to be in charge of the policing of the World Council buildings, and the responsibility was there, too. As Major Hendricks, his immediate superior, had once told him, "you wipe their noses, hold their hands and do everything but

tuck them into bed at night." He had been talking about the senators and their staffs.

Responsible or not, Sam had noticed that none of his superiors felt it necessary for them to be stationed at the World Council Headquarters. They were at the Polar Base or supervising the examination teams scattered over the globe. Sam would have liked to be one of them. Keeping an eye on the nations so as to make sure that no one tried to secretly re-arm was a useful job. One day he might be allowed to join them. One day. Even the Health Army had more to do than he had, despite his title. At least they had to be on constant alert, and there was always the chance of their being sent on an extermination party to wage war against the insect life threatening the food production. But, Sam admitted, they probably were as bored at times as he was now.

At the moment Sam was drawing up the duty roster for the coming week. Mike, his secretary, a rookie cop who hadn't yet worn his uniform into creases, reached out to the intercom as it hummed its attention signal.

"Captain Falkirk's office." He listened to the voice from the machine, the directional speaker throwing a cone of clarity about

his head and a muffled squawking everywhere else, an arrangement which permitted official business to be conducted privately in the presence of outsiders. He snapped off the machine and turned to Sam. "Report from courier control, sir. One of their messengers, Angelo Augustine, collapsed on Park Avenue a short while ago. He's been taken to the General Mercy Hospital."

"Angelo!" Sam stared his surprise. "What was the trouble?"

"Control didn't say, sir."

"And you didn't ask." Sam shook his head with exaggerated severity. "How can we make out a report without all the facts, Mike? The messenger is one of our people and comes under our jurisdiction." He drummed his fingers on his desk. "Get to work on it, Mike. All information as fast as possible."

"Yes, sir." Mike reached for the videophone and spun the dial. The screen lit up with the image of the switchboard operator. "Police, here," said Mike. "Get me the General Mercy Hospital. Casualty department." He waited as the screen blurred then steadied to reveal a new image.

"General Mercy Hospital. Can I help you?" The nurse was young

and very pretty. Mike smiled at her as he introduced himself.

"You have a patient, one of our messengers, a man named Angelo Augustine. Would you tell me his condition, please?"

"One moment, sir." The screen hummed and showed a blank wall. The nurse returned. "Condition of patient is critical. Preliminary diagnosis is cardiac thrombosis with bronchial complications."

"Thank you." Mike cut the connection. "Heart," he said in answer to Sam's questioning stare. "His pump must have given out on him." He dialed the operator again and asked for police headquarters. He introduced himself, asked his questions, fumed at the delay and hit the cut-off switch as if he hated it.

"They don't like us," he said. He was referring to the local police. "The time they take to answer a few simple questions!"

"They're probably busy," said Sam. "What did they say?"

"Not much. Apparently Angelo simply collapsed just as he was about to cross Park Avenue. An officer standing close to him called an ambulance. They promised to send in a report as soon as they could." He shrugged. "It's heart trouble right enough."

"Is it?" Sam was thoughtful. "I

spoke to him only a little while ago, and he seemed all right then." He reached for his phone, asked for and was connected with the medical centre, spoke to records and then asked for the resident physician. The face which appeared on the screen was old, wise and with an innate good humour. Doctor Jelks could afford to be good humoured. The senators and staff of the World Council demanded the best medical attention they could get, and the resident physician was one of the best.

"Hello, Sam. How's your health?"

"Blooming." Sam and Jelks were old friends. He became serious. "Something rather unpleasant has come up. A messenger, Angelo Augustine, collapsed on Park Avenue and was taken to the General Mercy Hospital. Their diagnosis is heart trouble. Records tell me that you checked him only two weeks ago." He paused, letting his question hang on the air.

"You think I boo-boosed, is that it?" Jelks shook his head. "The trust some people have in the old medic. Hell, Sam, if I passed him as fit, then he was fit. You know that."

"He's in a bad way," reminded Sam. "His condition is critical.

Cardiac thrombosis and complications." He paused again. "Maybe you'd better check."

"I'll do that, and then I'll come up for a personal apology." Jelks' anger was artificial. "Expect me immediately."

He took a little longer than immediately, and by the time the doctor arrived Sam had discovered the switch in assignments. He was about to phone the Japanese legation when Jelks came hurrying into the office. On the videophone he had seemed perfectly normal; it was only in the direct lighting that his pallor revealed itself for what it was. He sat down, his left hand holding a thick file blotched with the blue star. He was worried.

"Were you joking, Sam?" He answered his own question. "No, of course you weren't, but the thing is incredible." He opened the file. "I checked Augustine myself only a few days ago and the man was as fit as could be expected for a man of his age. He had the full treatment, too, electrocardiograph, electroencephalograms, blood tests, the works. He was good for at least another ten years, and his heart was sound."

"And yet he's in hospital with a critical heart condition," pointed out Sam. "Something isn't making

sense, doc." He pushed forward the phone. "Maybe you'd better check yourself."

"I will." Jelks grabbed the instrument and dialed the number. He snapped at the receptionist, demanded to be put in contact with the doctor in charge, settled for someone else and made no attempt to hide his impatience. From then on the conversation grew technical and bristled with medical jargon. As it progressed Jelks grew more subdued and, when he finally cut the connection, he had lost much of his good humour.

"I can't believe it." Jelks stared blankly at the file he had brought with him. "His heart couldn't have been in that condition."

"Tell me." Sam had tried to follow the conversation and had become lost. "How bad is he?"

"Damn bad. They've bypassed his heart with an exciter and are filtering his blood." Jelks beat his hand softly against the wad of papers on his lap. He suddenly looked every day of his hundred and eleven years of age. "I've got to go over to the hospital, Sam, you can see that, can't you? If I slipped up over Augustine, then I may have slipped over others. I can't take that risk or expect them to take it. I've got to be sure."

"I understand. Mike will arrange

transport." Sam hesitated. He was thinking of Carmen. "You said he was bad, Jelks; just how bad did you mean? Is he going to die?"

"He shouldn't." Jelks was impatient to get away. "Not if I know my business and the hospital know theirs. But then he shouldn't have collapsed, either." He looked at Sam. "Thinking of his family?"

"Yes."

"They can't do anything. They can't even see him, not yet. But I suppose they'll have to be told."

"I'll tell them," said Sam. It was a duty he didn't relish.

The Augustines lived in a small, downtown house, one of a row of identical buildings squeezed together as if for mutual support. It was late when Sam arrived and found that, as usual, the bad news had travelled before him. Mario, Augustine's grandfather, opened the door and ushered him into a cluttered living room. Two other Blues were sitting on chairs, Evelyn, Angelo's mother, and Tonio, his father. All three of the Blues looked about the same age.

"We heard about it," said Mario. "The hospital phoned us. It's a bad thing to happen, Sam."

"I know. Is Carmen home yet?"

"She's upstairs with Clarissa." Mario looked worried. "She's taken it hard, Sam."

"Clarissa?" Sam dropped his uniform cap on a chair and lit a cigarette. "She'll get over it. After all, it isn't as if Angelo were dead. He'll be as good as new in a little while." He wished that he could feel as confident as he sounded.

"I hope so." Mario crossed the room to where a thirty-inch telly set emitted a soft blur of sound and colour and switched it off. The sudden cessation of noise was startling. Evelyn rose from where she had been sitting by the window.

"You'll want to see Carmen," she said. "I'll get her." She looked at the other two Blues. "Mario, you'd better stay with Clarissa. Tonio, you can help me in the kitchen." She changed her mind. "Better still, you entertain Sam while I make some coffee. You'd like some coffee, wouldn't you, Sam?" As a question it was simply window dressing; she had gone before he could answer. Her daughter entered the room shortly afterwards.

Carmen was a product of the merging of two races and had retained the best qualities of both. Her hair and eyes were of a deep and unusual black, her skin white and flawless, her figure belonged on the telly screens and her poise and assurance were to be envied.

Now she had lost her poise and her eyes were red from weeping.

"I phoned the hospital again," she said dully. "No change."

"Jelks will phone as soon as there is anything definite to report," said Sam. He turned as Evelyn entered the room, a tray bearing cups, sugar, cream and coffee in her hands. There was also a pile of small cakes. "How's Clarissa now?"

"Sleeping." Evelyn set down the tray. "She'll be all right when she wakes. It was shock more than anything else. We haven't had a serious illness in the family since my brother died." She busied herself with the cups. "I hope you like these cakes. I made them from a new recipe, yeast flour mixed with dried algae. They're supposed to be full of nourishment."

"I'll eat them." Sam knew that she was talking more to fill in the silence than for any real need to communicate. He bit into one of the cakes. "Good."

"Are they? I'm so glad." Evelyn looked at the other Blue. "Come on, Tonio, I need you in the kitchen." Obediently, he followed her from the room.

It was crude and, at any other time, Sam would have felt slightly amused at the obvious manœuvr-

ing. The tricks of the elders to leave young couples on their own hadn't altered much over the centuries, but this time it was more than that. More than years separated the Blues from normal people. There was a change of outlook, a tranquillity and calmness unknown to the young. Angelo was very ill, maybe dying, and they probably felt very sorry about it, but it wasn't the same sorrow which tormented Carmen and her mother. They could neither be wholly in sympathy with it or truly understand it. Only Sam could do that, and he had been left alone to comfort her.

For, to a person in grief, love is the greatest comfort there is.

Carmen felt it, too, and she was awkward as she poured the coffee. Sam, trying to fill a vacuum, switched on the television. Together, they sat and looked at the screen.

"The Spot Quiz," said Carmen listlessly. "I wonder if they ever have to pay out the prize money?"

"I doubt it." Sam was cynical. "The Quiz Master is smart and probably holds a degree in psychology. The way he operates is obvious. First, he selects a contender, finds out just what he does, asks him a few simple questions a moron could answer, then knocks him out by asking

him something totally outside his field."

"Like that man?" Carmen adjusted a control and the sound grew in volume.

"Yes. He's a trouble-shooter. The last question will probably be on something like geology or nuclear physics. Something quite a few people can answer, but not him. That makes the question seem fair." Sam nodded at the success of his prophecy. "You see? How would a man like that know what a parsec is?"

"Clever," said Carmen without interest. She sat before the screen, staring at it without looking at it. "Sam," she said abruptly. "Is father going to die?"

"Of course not."

"Don't lie to me!" She turned towards him, suddenly fierce. "Why do people insist on lying? If he's going to die, then why not say so? Does it make it any the less true by denying it?"

"Steady." Sam took her hands between his own. "He isn't dead yet," he reminded. "And there's no reason to think that he will die at all."

"There was no reason to think that he'd collapse, either." Carmen was bitter. She squeezed his hands in sudden contrition. "Sorry, Sam. I guess my nerves are all on edge."

"Isn't that natural?"

"Don't misunderstand me, Sam." She looked directly into his eyes. "I'm no Pollyanna. I think a lot of my father, but it goes deeper than that. There's my mother and Tonio and his wife, and Mario, too. What's going to become of them if father dies?"

"They'll get by," he said awkwardly. "But why look on the black side? Angelo isn't dead; why talk as if he was?"

"Now or ten years, what's the difference?" Carmen was deliberately hurting herself, and Sam knew it. "Legal death or actual death, the problem's the same. Mother's getting old and is about due for treatment. That'll make four of them, Sam. Four dependent Blues. What sort of a future have they to look forward to?"

And, thought Sam grimly, what sort of a future have you? Marriage was one way out, but who wanted to take on such a burden? And Carmen wasn't the type of girl to run out and leave her people to starve.

"You must think I'm a heel," she said. "Do you?"

"You are a woman. All women are realists."

"And all men know how to dodge the point at issue." She

withdrew her hands. "What do you think of me, Sam?"

"I think that you are beautiful," he said, then stopped. He was no prude and no stranger to the opposite sex. He had even been in love a couple of times when younger, fortunately with women who, at the time, had had more sense than himself. More sense or a greater love of security. They had wanted children and he hadn't. He still didn't. But in a world where children were now an economic necessity, marriage without them was unthinkable.

"Flatterer!" Carmen smiled, pleased at his compliment, used to them as she must have been. She became serious. "Sam, should the worst happen you—know what I mean—what shall I do?"

"If Angelo should die?" Sam switched off the telly set and faced the girl. "Well, he's insured, of course?"

"The usual policy," she admitted. "Lump sum at death if death should occur before treatment. Smaller sum and cost of treatment guaranteed. But it's all we have, Sam."

"You have the house," he reminded. There would be no pension, of course, pensions were a thing of the past. "You could use the insurance money to convert the building and then let off

the rooms." He frowned at the cluttered living room. "I'm surprised that you haven't done it before. This place is large enough to bring in a fairly good income. And then, naturally, you could always get married."

"Yes," she said softly. "I could, couldn't I?" There was no mistaking the invitation in her eyes. Sam wavered, feeling a peculiar sense of the grotesque. Reaction, he guessed, the aftermath of an emotional storm and the urgencies of nature always trying in one way or another to restore the population. One man dead or dying, one man lost, balance the equation with a new marriage and plenty more offspring.

The curse was that he was in love with the girl and he knew it.

"Angelo will be all right," he said quickly. "You'll see. You'll both be laughing over this in a little while." He was talking banalities, and knew it, but it helped to fill the silence and ease the strain. He was glad when Evelyn knocked on the door and called to him.

"Sam. You're wanted on the phone."

It was Jelks and his face, on the screen, was grim. "Glad to catch you, Sam," he said. "I was afraid that you'd left. How's the family?"

"As you would expect. What's

new?" He guessed the answer.
"Angelo's dead."

"Yes, Sam, Angelo's dead." Jelks lifted his arm, the movement betraying the surgical cover-skin he wore. "I've just finished the autopsy."

"Was it heart failure?" Sam almost hoped it wasn't. To pass an unfit man as fit was a mistake which would cost Jelks more than his job. Human life now, as never before, was sacred.

"Depends on what you mean by heart failure," said Jelks. "A man shot through the pump could be said to have died of heart

failure; if his heart hadn't stopped he'd still be living."

"Well, then?"

"Angelo didn't die a normal death, Sam. Something killed him."

"Murder?" Sam was incredulous. "Is that what you're saying?"

"I don't know." Jelks looked baffled. "Murder implies a human adversary and so I just don't know. But I'm positive about one thing. Angelo Augustine didn't die a normal death."

The horror had begun.

(To be continued)

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MELROSO

by DUNCAN LAMONT

He was such a likeable person and it would have been so easy to have been really friendly with him—Instead of wishing that I could kill him

SOMETIMES I CAN SEE IT IN Melroso's eyes—that haunted, searching look. As if his surroundings suddenly struck him as being incongruous, or his companions unusual. The brown beaded pupils flick from side to side for a moment, then he blinks once or twice to wash his mind clear and continues talking. It's a small thing, and of no consequence unless you have a conscience as sensitive as mine. But every time it happens I get that sinking, guilt-ridden feeling that slinks along the trail of an ill-advised action like a jackal following a tiger.

Perhaps I'm taking the whole thing too seriously. Perhaps that evanescent lost look means nothing more than a spasm of mental abstraction. I could ask. But he'd choose his answer so carefully to avoid hurting me that it wouldn't mean a thing. And then he would stop doing it and that sense of estrangement—imagined or otherwise—would gnaw away inside of him and I would never know if he was free of it.

Things are better the way they are.

It's ridiculous really to feel so . . . paternal towards an alien life form. If Melroso had six legs, or antennæ, or was covered with fur I wouldn't feel this way. But unfortunately he isn't. He looks just like the boy next door.

He's a little on the short side, about five feet tall with dark wiry hair and a sunbronzed complexion. He's sitting across the lounge just now talking to Telmar, the ship's doctor. He's talking nineteen to the dozen with perfect diction and Telmar's sweating slightly keeping track. But he's not complaining—which could mean that he's noticed that look in the boy's eyes also.

It should be a good feeling, heading back home in command of the first successful interstellar expedition—but somehow it isn't. I can't blame the ship, or the crew, or the place that we've been. I can't blame the food, or the drink, or the angle of this chair—or the sixth of my life span that's draining away into the hard vacuum outside. I can't blame a single thing but that look in Melroso's eyes . . . and my conscience.

It's a lazy man's world out between the stars. The ship purrs and ticks along like a well-wound clockwork toy and asks nothing of its crew but the ability to remain sane through twelve years of steel bulkheads and the same company. I've got the most indolent, unambitious bunch of space-ticketed tramps the psycho department could rake up—and I wouldn't change one of them for a gold-plated satellite.

Take Telmar. One of his diplomas is in lethargy. I've never been able to translate that string of letters after his name fully, but I'm willing to bet *one* of his degrees is in the aforementioned subject. Probably with honours. Talking to Melroso's the hardest work he's done in nine years.

The rest of the crew are pretty much the same. Their methods of relaxing may vary, but the resultant effect is standard. Namely: restful.

We're a collection of natural-born bums riding a nonstop freight without a guard. Man's vanguard to the stars.

When I think of the collection of eager guinea-pigs we left behind, I don't know whether to laugh or cry. Psycho chewed the volunteers into a fine meal and dusted the floor with them. "Not phlegmatic enough," they said. "Haven't the temperament."

Who ever heard of a phlegmatic volunteer?

They searched good and long for a crew—a spaceworthy, phlegmatic crew. Finally they found us. Right at the bottom of the barrel.

Under that thick, meaty, enthusiastic crust of efficient, highly-strung spacemen who formed the body of the Interplanetary Service. They pulled us to light with glad cries of joy—which weren't echoed in other well-informed circles—and asked us politely if we'd care to volunteer.

We didn't, of course. Just wasn't our way. So they had to bribe us.

This ship has more luxury per square inch than most interplanetary liners have in their complete first-class accommodation. And the cook's wages would make the captain of the aforesaid liner green about the gills. The comic who declared that the arm-chairs in the main lounge were custom-moulded was only stating the plain truth. But the green in his eye doesn't show from here.

Neither does that green mountain of credit notes that's piling up in my bank account back home. That *should* cheer me up. How many bills to a parsec? I worked that one out once, about six years back. Also in credits per hour. Made me feel good at the time. The most expensive man in the known universe. The sense of importance almost went to my head. I remember going up to the control room and switching on a viewing screen with my little finger. Nonchalant. I'd probably have snapped out a few orders if there'd been anyone around to take them.

Melroso glanced this way. Just a flicker of the head and a short, sharp stillness.

It doesn't necessarily mean a thing.

Six years slipping comfortably down a long metal tube brought us from one star to another. It didn't require any effort. Just time.

I knew personally about six of the men who helped to build this ship. Some of them spent their lives on the job. Time was something they never had enough of. They couldn't move fast enough to keep up with their thoughts and plans. When they finished, the ones that were still alive looked at the years that were left and saw them stretching emptily into a tedious future. They tried to get crew places and stay with the job. They probably saw themselves polishing, improving, improvising. Still building. They couldn't admit that their part in the project was over. They hated my guts for walking in and taking over *their* beautiful mechanisms. They hated them even more when they heard what I was getting paid for the privilege.

I took one of them up to the control room about a week before we left. I sat him down in front of the button-board and outlined the routine. It didn't take long. He sat with his long clever fingers brushing the buttons, and said: "That's all you have to do?"

"At six-yearly intervals."

"I don't get it."

"Look," I said. "They're not paying me to control this ship—that's practically incidental. They're paying for my time—and the way I feel about it."

"I know this ship inside out," he said.

"There's no relation. The contents of this can are guaranteed inert, durable and non-corrosive. Our only function is to turn it around at the other end. This is a trial run, not a colonisation project."

"What did you mean about time?" he asked.

"You helped to build this ship," I said. "You took a portion of the metal and twisted it around until it pleased you. You probably broke a lot of pieces before you got it just right. But that didn't matter. There was plenty more metal. Now, I'm a part of this ship. The psycho department broke a lot of good men before *they* got what they wanted. And what they wanted was this crew."

"You take any man and shoot him out into space at some appreciable fraction of the speed of light, and what happens?"

"His time scale relative to Earth changes."

"Right," I said. "Up to a point. But what psycho found out the hard way, was that his mind—his own personal appreciation of the flow of time—doesn't. All the physical processes toe the line neatly—except for that one. The resulting strain is enough to drive the normal man out of his mind."

He looked at the bright buttons bitterly. But they just sat there on their neat metal hood and didn't give a damn. So he turned to me and said: "Only the freaks get to the stars."

"No," I said patiently. "We'll pilot the others. The mind can be drugged. There'll always be enough of us to man the ships and look after the others while we're running."

"Why should it be you?" he burst out. "A fat, lazy lump of minimum-energy-expenditure like you."

I wasn't riled. Why should I be? Everything he said was true enough. It wasn't his fault—nor mine—that laziness had been suddenly promoted to a major virtue. My type of laziness, that is.

"Don't look at the cook while you're eating the pie," I advised. "This ship might never have been built."

We left it at that.

He was an intelligent man. If one of his pieces of metal had been necessarily displeasing to him, he wouldn't have minded. But the simile didn't gell in his brain. Perhaps the money had a lot to do with that. A green, mossy cushion for my brittle pride . . .

That was something I couldn't have explained.

I wonder what Telmar is thinking. It was his decision as much as mine that put Melroso where he is just now. I wonder if the jackals of doubt are gnawing at him.

If we'd been the men the world expected to run this ship, the jackals would have gone hungry. There's little rich meat on a well-matured commander-type—and

too much on a lethargic philosopher.

I could use a drink, but physical actions are dangerous things in this two-time world of ours. Brain cells find fault with muscular reaction times and that gulf we span starts to widen. Still, that's a thing we minimise—and cope with.

The sitting-and-thinking hazards are the worst.

Or rather, the sitting-and-not-thinking hazards. When the threads of thought run out leaving an empty reel spinning . . . too fast. That's the time to find yourself a day-dream quickly—or head for bed with a sleeping pill. Personal time seeps in through the cracks in connected thought and corrodes the anchor chain between mind and body. You sense the dragging separation of mental and physical perception tearing you apart. You . . .

I was twenty-nine years of age—Earth time—when we left home. Eight years in space and one on—that planet. We never did get around to naming it, and the native word was one of these unpronounceable, memory-slipping collections of vocal approximations that are invented to be forgotten. We'll let the folk back home worry about it. They'll come up with something good and Greek and everyone'll be as happy as Hephaestion.

But whatever they call it, it was a nice place. The details were different, but the view from far enough back was pretty much like Earth. Blue oceans, white snow-

fields, green and brown stretches of land—there were even people and cities.

Melroso's people. Melroso's cities.

The similarities were incredible. They sat up and begged for attention. They drew the mind's focus away from the all-important differences.

Things like metabolic rates.

At first we put it down to the after-effects of a prolonged dose of time-contraction. It was a plausible theory. After all, we were pioneers—unavoidably—in that respect. Then it began to dawn on us that the inhabitants of this world we'd plucked out of the void really *did* walk, talk and think like characters in an over-speeded micro-reel. But by that time we'd got to like them and it didn't seem important. In any case, it had its advantages.

Their top linguists took our language to bits, analysed it, constructed a frequency modulator to bring it within their vocal range, and were correcting the second engineer's grammar inside two weeks.

It made your eyes ache to watch them.

Later, Telmar worked out some rate-corrected IQ figures. They came out about Earth-normal. I believed his figures—but it took an effort of will. By then they had learned to slow their reactions down to our level and developed a modulator no bigger than a hearing aid. So, if you sat down and talked to one, there was no

sense of alienness. The accelerated beat of their thought processes were well buried. They just seemed to be that much brighter.

And more likeable.

Likeable . . .

The word's hardly strong enough, but it'll have to do. You'd have lent your last credit to any one of them—and been glad of the opportunity.

It was a characteristic that led us to take a lot of chances with them. We talked openly and almost freely. We toured them round the ship. Not the Drive section, of course; but most of the rest. We even took a party on a trip round the other three barren planets in their system.

That was when we realized they had no problems of personal time adjustment.

That was when the subject of taking one of them back with us was broached.

That was when Melroso's name was first mentioned . . .

They've stopped talking.

Telmar is leaning back in his chair and his eyes are frosting over and the slippers on his feet are sliding through the pile of the carpet—knocking the tufts down one by one. In a physical moment—real moment, clock-on-the-wall moment—his eyes will close. The tensions will relax in the walled-off mind and a thought will come dancing at a bidden tempo. And the lead-like body will vanish in its pool of treacle.

Melroso is rising.

This is the thing that I hate and love. This is torture—and cool water for a parched mind.

He stands and walks. His reactions are keyed down as far as they'll go—a micrometer screw cutting a grating on his own physical time scale. But still he walks as my mind insists I should. This is the thing I should hate him for—and can't.

He's coming over here. To sit and talk. On three levels. My vocal chords will trail my mind like a puppy running after a car. And his mind will be a thousand miles ahead of my stumbling thoughts; parsecs in front of my fumbling tongue. And every now and again I'll see that look in his eyes—that pause when he loses the tenuous thread of communication, searches for the time-dimmed thought that prompted the movement of my lips.

It's enough to drive a man—or an alien—mad.

And he's the one who'll break first. The odds are crew-strength to one. That's one reason why Melroso's so likeable. If I started to dislike him, I'd have to multiply the converse feeling by the factor already mentioned. The equation has too many unknowns. My solution is only an approximation. If I could be sure of success, I would kill him.

That is a commander-type decision—made by a philosopher. Both of us realize its necessity. Neither of us can suggest a method of implementation.

He could kill the whole crew while I was lifting my arm.

I can't even talk the problem over with the others. If he speeded up his movements and kept mobile, he just wouldn't register on my retina. I would lock him in a room and throw away the key—if I could be sure he wouldn't slip past my weary body like some vengeful ghost. I think of a million plans a day and I look across at Telmar, or one of the others, and think perhaps they are planning also—but I can't tell. Then I look at Melroso, and perhaps he is planning, too. He could break . . . now. But he never does. Then I reconstruct the equation with soothing thoughts of inherent racial stability—purely hypothetical—and tuck it away in a corner of my mind.

And then I think of the others. Not of their thoughts and plans, but their possible actions. And the consequences of failure.

And I am powerless. A commander would go mad. So I put up the screens and philosophize. Like a man in a minefield on a barren, empty planet.

Now Melroso is sitting down in the chair beside me. His eyes are brown and friendly, and his lips are quirked in a pleasant, wholesome smile. And my conscience gives a twinge because he's light-years from home and his people, and it's all our fault.

And he's such a likeable person.

Asymptote

by

H. PHILIP STRATFORD

It wasn't hard to kill the dictator; he died as easily as other men. The trouble was that he didn't stay dead

LAYTON might have been young to harbour violent political ideas; but he was quite old enough to be a dedicated fanatic possessing the rapid reflexes required by an assassin.

He walked smartly along the shining corridor, acting precisely as he had been instructed—he settled the stolen surgeon's white coat neatly about his shoulders—and with a single, casual yet comprehensive glance at the guard, turned into the radiological ward. The people inside were grouped about a complex piece of apparatus wheeled near a bed. A TV camera whirred busily up near the ward sister's room.

Layton nodded with satisfaction. Everything was as he had expected. The public appearance

was going according to schedule.

He pushed through the people clustered about the bed until he could see the man making the speech. The words floated on the ether-scented air without meaning. Phrases: "Immense new potential," "new medicine," "wonderful new machine." Layton fought back the curl of disgust that twisted his lips.

The President was making a scheduled public appearance, cutting the blue ribbon on a new radiological device, and he was talking as though all of medicine had thereby been solved. Layton's hand moved smoothly under the white coat. He had the right man, that was obvious.

It would have been obvious from the stereotyped clothes alone. The neatly brushed, unobtrusive

blue uniform, the black buttons, the starched white shirt and lavender string tie. By themselves they were a trade mark. They would have told him that he was looking at President Sumerman.

But you couldn't look at President Sumerman's clothes without being conscious of the vitality of the man himself.

Layton stared at the bland, pink skin, the domed forehead and meticulously brushed chestnut hair—with the single artfully straying unruly lock. The gleam from contact-lensed eyes was overpowering. About the whole head and face was the look of power, authority, unquestioned obedience.

Layton took his hand out from the stolen coat, pointed the gun and pulled the trigger.

President Sumerman disappeared in a flare of ravening light. Part of the wall beyond, the edge of a bed, some of the brand new equipment and a nurse's arm went also in that blinding flash of brilliance.

Layton felt sorry about the nurse. He turned briskly, pushed through the stunned crowd, and ran lightly out into the corridor. Attracted by the sudden outbreak of screaming that followed Layton, the guard at the far end of the corridor began to run towards the door, unlimbering his weapon.

"Quick!" Layton shouted, exactly as he had been instructed.

"There's been an accident. I'm here!"

Unquestioningly, the guard ran into the ward, tangling with those rushing out. Layton sprinted for the corridor corner, gained it, and began—for the first time—to believe he might come out of this alive.

He dived for a wide armour-glass window, his gun blasting it before he catapulted head-over-heels through.

He was sixty-seven storeys up over the city. Below, a humming web of activity, spread the cross-overs and streets, and elevated rollways. There was a faint bluish haze, and the sun rode surrounded by pink-flecked clouds. Layton activated his antigrav belt and slanted away from the hospital building on a course that would bring him to the forty-ninth floor of the General-Mutual building.

There, as instructed, a contact would be waiting with a change of clothes and fresh orders. It was very simple, really . . .

A head appeared at the window Layton had just quitted. A tight-lipped face was partially obscured by the telescopic sights. A brown, steady finger contracted on the trigger.

Layton, thinking how simple it all was, pointed himself at the General-Mutual building—and then everything went dark. His charred body fell five hundred feet to the ground.

"So perish all dictators," said Charles Wayne piously.

"Well, this time, at least, we made sure of it." Rizzotti clasped his hairy hands together, the overhead lights striking brilliantly from his thumb-ring. "I'd better get word to the boys to move in and start taking over."

"We'll clean up the whole city, first. Then we'll move on the country. Clear out all this scientific trap Sumerman hands-handed—out." Wayne's eyes shone. "We'll start a new life for everyone!"

He lifted the circlet of the transcom from his head, shuddering at the memory of that abrupt, hideous transition—of hope going for the General-Mutual building to the blackness of—of what? It was never pretty to be in mental contact with a man when he died. Poor Layton. Dedicated—useful—expended.

"This time we got Sumerman!" he said suddenly. He swung on Rizzotti. "You realise that? We got him! All those times before when we thought we had. When he was only wounded, or someone else in the next car bought it, or he hadn't turned up and we blew up an empty platform—they're all in the past, laughable, now." He took a deep breath. "We finally assassinated President Sumerman!"

"Don't let it break you up, Wayne," Rizzotti snapped. "Don't

start feeling sorry for the dictator. And, another thing. Layton was charred. His body fell a long way. But there'll still be enough of him to identify! You know the police methods. None of us will be safe until the boys move in. They've got to get to those key positions before the police react. I'll see you later. I've work to do."

Wayne watched as Rizzotti packed hurriedly and left their cabin perched high in the wild woodlands of the north. They'd decided, when they inaugurated their scheme to overthrow the government, that a safe hideaway was essential. A helicopter could find this cabin; but that was about all.

To Charles Wayne, President Sumerman was a blight. The entire nation groaned under the thrall of scientific wizardry, subverted to the ends of one man, both nation and science perverted and distorted from what they could and should be. With Sumerman out of the way, Rizzotti and his carefully trained cells should be able to take over with little difficulty. There would be a panicky stage of internecine strife between the remnants of the puppet government, each member struggling for the supreme position, none realising that the new order would come from without the government.

Charles Wayne smiled slightly.

He had no intentions of allowing the nation to come to such a low ebb when he was president. Oh, no! He set things up so that people had to go along the right way. They'd act as people with spirit and determination to live a better life—he'd see to that.

He reached out and flipped the TV on. Might even see the TV station takeover by one of Rizzotti's cells. It was a prime objective.

Then he tensed. His face drained of blood. His fists, clenched at his side, pained and he realised he had driven his fingernails into his palms.

The TV screen cleared. An announcer was talking, and then, with a wave of his hand and a deferential bow, introduced President Sumerman.

The camera panned, caught Sumerman dead centre, and tracked in. The President looked fresh, clean, his lavender string tie brilliant against the snowy shirt.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began in that rolling voice, "I am here to tell you that today the nation was spared a great tragedy. The Memorial Hospital, unfortunately, has lost its newest piece of apparatus and a young nurse is now deprived of her right arm. We all regret these things." His bland, pink-cheeked face grew grim. "But I am thankful to tell you that I was spared to carry on

my devoted work to the country and to each one of you personally."

President Sumerman went on like that for some time, gradually working up to a pean of glory for the regime. At each word Wayne heard another nail driven in the coffin of his plans.

With trembling fingers, Wayne fumbled on the transcom and adjusted it to pick up Rizzotti.

"Yeah, Wayne, I heard." The big man's voice came into Wayne's mind bitterly. "Looks like Layton boobed."

"But he couldn't! We saw him do it! The transcom can't lie—you know that!"

"Sure I know—but does President Sumerman? Look, Wayne, don't do anything foolish." There was concern in Rizzotti's voice. "I'm coming straight back. I've already put wraps around the cells. They'll go back again to their everyday jobs until we call 'em out. Now take it easy!"

"All right. But make sure no one is tracked—I know you have faith in this cell system of yours; but it's still possible for a man belonging to one cell to contact somebody else—a woman, for instance—from another. That way the whole system could break down."

"Don't worry, it won't." Rizzotti sounded confident. "I'm over the city now. Everything

looks normal. Sumerman must have had complete control of the situation as soon as Layton left the hospital."

"Hurry up!" Wayne said. Then he added: "I still can't understand what happened."

"Layton was a slipshod fool! It's simple."

"But we saw him on the transcom. He definitely killed Sumerman—you saw it, too."

"Maybe I thought I saw it." Rizzotti's voice was uncertain. "I don't know. I'm contacting Landers. He'll be meeting us at the cabin."

"He's next?"

"That's right. He's next."

"This time," said Charles Wayne. "This time we'll make sure of President Sumerman."

Landers went the same way as Layton. Wayne didn't bother to issue any instructions to Rizzotti after they saw the car with President Sumerman in it topple off the flyover and crash three hundred feet to the concrete beneath.

He watched through the transcom as mobile police surrounded the heavy trailer-truck Landers had been driving and nodded with grim approval as the assassin committed suicide as a good fanatic should.

But he still didn't make any move to fly into the city to take over duty as the new President.

He waited for Rizzotti to come through on the transcom, and then switched on the TV. An announcer, looking only very little bothered, was speaking.

". . . concrete. The car landed on its wheels, fortunately, and the occupants were shaken up. President Sumerman joked as they took the wreck away that it was the first time in some while he'd travelled by surface car."

Frozen faced, Wayne snapped off the TV.

"You see, Rizzotti," he said over the transcom, "we can't kill this man. He's supernormal, not ordinary."

"What should I do?" Rizzotti demanded. "Start casting silver bullets?"

"Talk coherently. We've got to think this thing out. And I've already got some ideas on the subject. Meet me tonight—not at the cabin. I'm coming into the city. I'll see you at Eddie's."

"Take it easy, Wayne." There was sudden concern in Rizzotti's voice. "If you're spotted in the city—"

"Sure. I know. But the asylum gave me a clean bill of health. And I'll lay low. Eddie's is quiet enough."

Eddie's was a shady bar perched on the roof of a decaying skyscraper over on the west side of town. Helicopters were the only means of reaching it; the ten

floors immediately below had been burned out and never repaired. The elevators had been rehung that amount further down.

Wayne slid his personal copter down onto the parking lot and attendants wheeled it away into the hangar. Going down into the long bar he looked about for Rizzotti, failed to see him, and philosophically ordered a Scotch. Soft music and soft lights combined to give a relaxing air. Couples danced on the terrace under strings of lanterns and the crisp odour of good food drifted temptingly.

Wayne put one foot on the rail and stared about. These people put on a fine front. They kidded themselves they were happy, enjoying life; when all the time they were living in fear, wondering when the next blow would fall from the vicious hands of President Sumerman. But he'd sort things out for them. He'd put it right, then they'd all be happy and be able to enjoy life.

A woman's silvery tinkle of laughter chimed from the dance floor and a group under potted palms joined in. Wayne's lips curled. When he was president they'd be able to laugh naturally, without pretending like this.

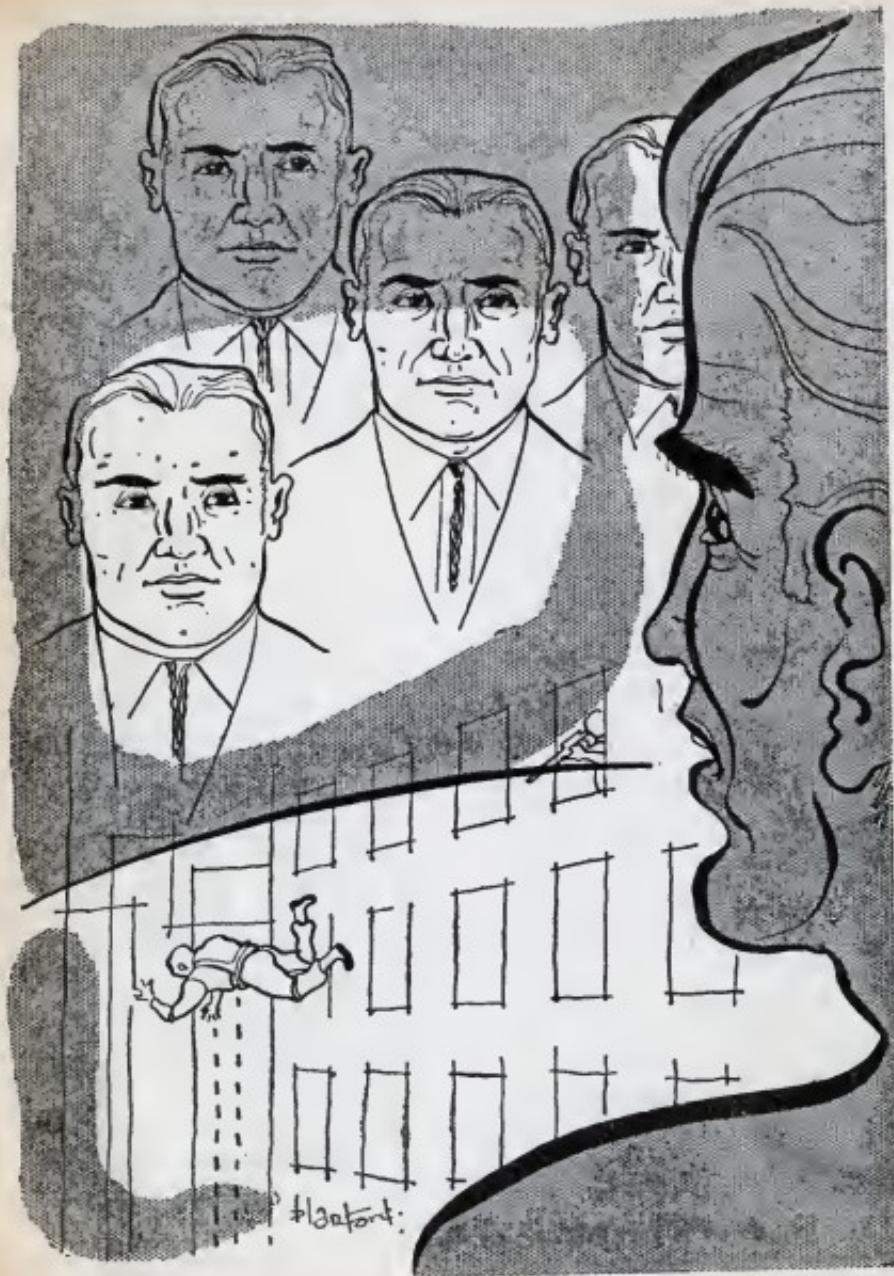
He tapped impatiently on the bar. Rizzotti was late. And Wayne had a fierce determination burning in him. He had decided what the

trouble was, why it seemed they could never dispose of President Sumerman. If only Rizzotti would get here, fast, he could pour it all out as it bubbled in his mind, over-ride any objections.

Whilst he was waiting he ran over in his memory the different methods they'd tried to eliminate Sumerman. They ranged from subtle radiation poisoning, administered by oral absorption—in the food and drink taken by Sumerman—to the crudity of the last two attempts. The TV announcements invariably followed very shortly after any attack had been carried out in public.

Wayne thought about that. At the beginning of the campaign, when they'd thought that they had merely to dispose of President Sumerman and the entire edifice of his dictatorial power, would collapse, the murder attempts had been entirely private, hidden from the public. Nothing had been said on TV about the attacks; always President Sumerman took an early opportunity to appear and speak in person. There was a pattern there.

When the attempts on the President's life could not be concealed from the knowledge of those present at the time, frank admission was made, always by the President, speaking in person and perfect bodily health. Well, almost. One time he'd appeared with a piece of plaster on his



cheek and an arm in a sling. Ever since then, there'd been a tiny scar on his cheek.

The man was indestructible.

"Hullo, Wayne, sorry I'm late." Wayne turned swiftly, seeing Rizzotti walking confidently over the terrace towards him. He finished his Scotch, ordered two more.

"I've got the answer," he began, before Rizzotti had seated himself. "Listen. You know why we never kill Sumerman? Well, I'll tell you. We do!"

"Go on," said Rizzotti, draining his glass.

"We kill him all right! Each time, we do, by God! Only the man we kill isn't Sumerman at all. It's a dummy! A fake! A dressed-up double, ready to get stuck in the guts for the sake of pay."

Rizzotti glanced around, then jerked his head. The two men moved across to a secluded table. Wayne's face was flushed and his eyes glittered.

"That sounds an interesting theory, Wayne. Sumerman sends out these doubles when he has a public appearance?"

"You're right he does! He skulks back there in that damn great mansion of his, sends out his hired stooges to face the righteous wrath of his public. We won't stand for it, you know. Sumerman has got to go!"

Rizzotti didn't answer. His

hairy hands played with his glass. Wayne stared at him.

"It's the answer, don't you see. We could go on killing these doubles for the rest of our lives for all the difference it would make to Sumerman."

"I don't think so." Rizzotti's words were hesitant, yet strangely meaningful. "He can't stand idly by and see the public made aware that there is a section who hate and fear him. And he won't keep sending his friends out to be killed."

Wayne's head reared back and he stared from narrowed eyes at his henchman. He let out a long breath.

"You'd better not go soft on me, Rizzotti! Who fears Sumerman? I don't! I hate him! I want to sweep him away and take control." His fingers clenched around his glass. "I can do it, too. I was in power once, before they usurped me. I was the dictator! What I said, went. But then this Sumerman came along with his double talk and the poor blind fools threw me out—me, the man who made them what they were!" Wayne was panting now, his face animalistic. "He's set up a beautiful facade of democracy and trust, and light and love—all to cloak his own ruthless rule. When I'm back I'll sweep it all away!"

"Yes," agreed Rizzotti. "You'll

sweep it all away. And what will you set up in its place?"

"What's the matter with you; you sick or something?" Wayne licked his lips. "Don't try to bandy words with me. You know I don't like to be crossed. They told you that at the asylum."

"Yes, Wayne, they did. When they gave you your new face, so you could mingle freely with people again. They thought they'd removed this load you're carrying, too. Can't you see that what you're trying to do is impossible? You were the old regime, and you were removed, and, now, at this minute, a good and upright man is in control of the nation. You can't go on bucking that, Wayne. Or killing off the President's friends the way you have."

Wayne stared in horror. One part of his mind recognised what this man sitting before him said as the sweetest of good sense, the type of thinking they'd indoctrinated him with at the asylum. And another part was screaming to him to strike down the unwanted thoughts this man conjured up, to kill and to flee. To rush away from the madness effect building up here in this quiet bar.

"Rizzotti!" Wayne choked. "You're not Rizzotti! They got to him. You're a substitute. Sent to capture me, just like those other substitutes' vapid faces took me in

before to killing the wrong person. No—I mean—"

Rizzotti—the government man who looked like Rizzotti—rose. He reached out a steady hand with an electro-manacle. His face, Rizzotti's face, was sorrowful and grave.

Wayne spun on his heel, raced to the terrace parapet and dived off.

Bedlam erupted behind him. But he was luckier, or madder, than Layton. He darted behind the straggle of evening homeward-bound traffic, turned his antigrav up to full power. He was sobbing with rage. They'd tried to take him by a trick and had nearly succeeded. Well—this time he, personally, would take a hand.

He'd find President Sumerman, personally, and deal with him as he deserved.

They couldn't keep on putting up clay pigeons for him to knock down. As that agent masquerading as Rizzotti had said, the public would fret. Questions would be asked. If only one small section of the nation were actively hostile to the government, that very minority represented an ulcer, a running sore, and the government—and that meant President Sumerman—would have to do something about it, quick.

Wayne smiled expectantly as he flung the antigrav towards the

President's mansion. This time he would cut through all the Gordian knots and settle the situation himself. He'd be able to penetrate the mansion—hadn't he lived there himself?—and find Sumerman. Then the final reckoning, a quick call to the cells that Rizzotti had built up, and he would be President again.

The thought reminded him. What had happened to Rizzotti?

Well, if his henchman was still alive, he could be found and rescued after the coup was over. Wayne knew that, on the face of it, his enterprise was foolish, reckless and impossible of success. But that was only how it would appear to an individual not in possession of the facts. Dictatorships, like colds, can change hands very fast. He'd been dispossessed with lightning speed. He knew very well that if he could dispose of Sumerman and rally enough loyal guns, the mansion, and the city—and the nation—were his.

Clouds were scudding before a freshening breeze and their dark bulbous masses above him were like the dark promises of underworld gods seen from the pits of hell. He tightened his grip on his gun and sent the antigrav belt spinning down towards the President's mansion.

One quick stroke, and the world was his again!

The landing on the inner terrace

of the mansion was easy. He avoided a patrol and fled in the first spots of rain spilling from a black sky. Inside the first doorway, he paused, panting from the quick rush. So far, so good.

He knew this place only too well. This door, small and partially concealed by a fluted column, had been installed at his order. He pressed the stud, the door opened, and he passed through into a corridor black as the Duke of Hell's riding boots. He flicked on the lights, went headlong down into the lower levels.

A thin blade of light leaped from a hole in the wall ahead. Wayne put his eye to the aperture, peered within.

A room, empty, sumptuously furnished, dignified. A low mahogany table with a crystal bowl filled with fruit. Long wine-red drapes. In the far wall, set between massive marble pillars, out of place, almost, a tall metal door.

Almost, and yet not quite. Beyond that door was the antechamber to his own apartments. No, of course not, not his any longer. Sumerman's.

And not Sumerman's for very much longer, either.

Cautiously, soundlessly, Wayne operated the panel and stepped into the room. He went past the mahogany table and across the luxurious carpet. At the metal

door, he took out his gun, slid the safety off and held it pointing before him.

Now for it. He took a deep breath.

He punched the stud and watched the metal door swing open.

As the ponderous valves rolled sideways, Wayne was estimating his chances of knocking out the two or three men who would be there. Aides, messengers, possibly a doctor. He was totally unprepared for the number of men sitting and lounging about the room.

There must have been twenty of them.

They all turned politely as the door opened, to freeze into silent, questioning immobility at sight of Wayne and his gun. Twenty men.

Twenty men with neat blue uniforms and white shirts and lavender string ties. Twenty men with high-domed foreheads, and artfully casual chestnut hair falling over smooth pink skin. Forty powerful contact-lensed eyes.

President Sumerman, times twenty.

Wayne thought fast. His reactions surprised the men in the room. As the President Sumermans collected their wits after that abrupt intrusion, Wayne swung back out of the door and slammed the stud to close it.

"All right!" he shouted through the narrowing slit. "I know none of you is President Sumerman! That I do know!" But he was too clever to tell these dummies that he also knew where Sumerman—the real Sumerman—would be. Sure, plastic surgery and geriatrics and all the trappings of science had saved his own life and brought him, alive and sane, out of the asylum. But it had also brought this devilish system of protection to the usurping President.

Oh, yes, Wayne knew that dictators had their doubles in the old days. He scuttled back for the panel across the dignified room. But they had been people with a facial resemblance, painted to resemble their master. They wouldn't have lasted two minutes on TV. The all-seeing eye of the camera, close up, would have pitilessly revealed every flaw and imperfection. The paint alone would have looked like the childish antics of a kid with a make-up kit.

It had needed the "resources of science to turn men into exact copies of the dictator. And just how well science had succeeded had been shown by the number of these doubles that Wayne and his dedicated followers had killed.

He was panting with exertion now as he ran back up the corridor, angled into a new direction and again descended to floor level. This should bring him out

to Sumerman's private bedroom. A wild fear choked in his throat that they had blocked the passage-way up—and an equally wild sob of relief escaped him as his fumbling fingers found the stud.

The panel swung open.

As he might have expected, had he been in any frame of mind to be able to stop and think, they were waiting for him this time.

Four President Sumermans stood looking at him, guns in their fists. A fifth reached out and twitched away his own weapon.

He stood, head down, staring from one to the other. There was a roaring in his head.

"I'll get you, Sumerman!" His voice sounded thin and far away to his ears. "I'll get you. Even if I have to kill every single one of your damn doubles."

One of the Sumermans spoke. There was a hint of sadness in his voice, rolling beneath the overtones of gravity and decision.

"He still doesn't realise. We'd better take him along to the meeting. We'll decide then."

Wayne had no clear impression until he found himself sitting dazedly in a chair, two men bulking large beside him, staring at the long polished table with the grim-faced Sumermen sitting on either side, their faces turned towards the one at the head. Wayne glared at this one man.

"You!" he screamed out, unable to control his trembling. "Sumerman! I'm coming for you!"

He tried to stand up and leap forward. A rigid stasis held him. He heard someone cough as though embarrassed. The table and the identical faces swam before him. He began to hope this was all a nightmare.

"Mr. Wayne," one of the Sumermen said.

Staring sickly up, Wayne saw that, with his changed focus, he was sitting at a different angle from the Sumerman he had thought to be at the head. And then he realised that the table was round and that no one was at the head.

At first, that didn't mean anything.

Then the voice came again.

"Mr. Wayne. You have been found guilty of plotting against the state. The government has decided that you—"

"Government!" Wayne screamed. "Government! What government? You mean you, Sumerman, the man who controls all."

"No, Wayne. You are wrong." There was a stir down the table. "There is no President Sumerman."

Wayne laughed.

He shouted insolently: "I'm no fool! Of course there is a President Sumerman. The man who runs the nation and employs men to go out and be killed for him."

"No, Wayne. Wrong again. This is a democracy. We are the government, met in session. Every member of the working cabinet is scientifically moulded to look like the psychologically most acceptable type of man. We are all individuals, dedicated to the working out of a democratic form of government——"

"Fools! Democracy will never work. You need a strong man, an iron hand, someone like me to keep the masses in order and to tell them what to do. To think for them."

"That is the way the people themselves think, Wayne. That is the way you, and your predecessors, taught them to think. We couldn't inaugurate a complete parliament and smoothly working democracy overnight. The people have to be trained up for that. It will take time. And, in the interim, there must be a strong man, a dictator, to tell the people what to do. We are the democratic government, soon to unveil ourselves, working through the agency of one man, this mythical President Sumerman."

Wayne tried to assimilate that, and failed.

The President Sumermans smiled, not altogether, and not quite all alike. They watched the wreck of the man in the chair as a symbol of the wreck of the old

way of doing things. The one who had been speaking went on talking evenly.

"Every time you or your men killed one of us, you put us to a great deal of inconvenience. We had to psycho all witnesses, make them forget that they had seen the dead body of a President Sumerman. But we were able to do that. Our techniques of memory control work well now. Only we do not abuse that power as you try to do."

Through the roaring in his head, Wayne stared glassy-eyed at the group of Sumermen. They were all leaning forward, looking at him, their identical faces mirroring different expressions. It was like staring down a ghastly reflecting hall, where crazy mirrors distorted your face and figure.

His trembling lips tried to frame words. They failed.

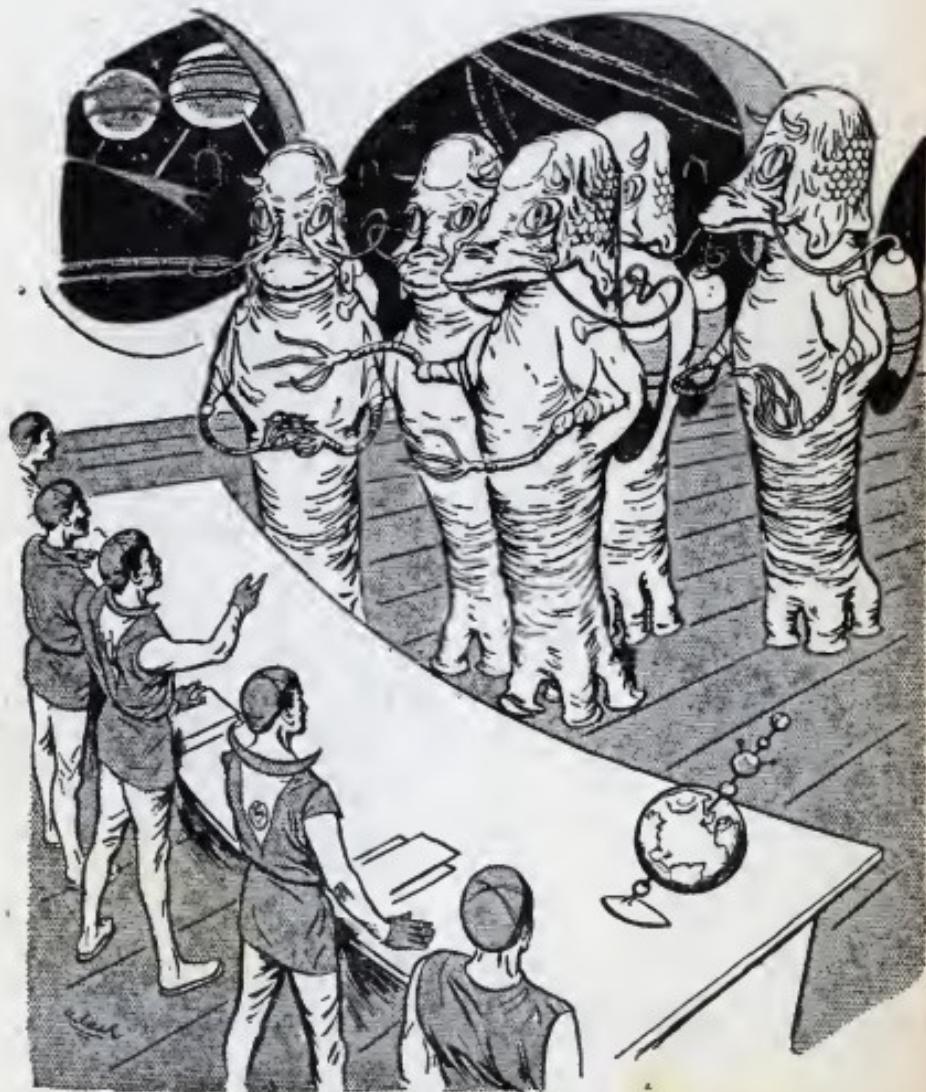
"We'll make you like a Sumerman, too, Wayne. We'll make you forget what you've been through. You'll be a small member of the government." There was the sonorous stroke of a final dictate in the words.

"You can be a President Sumerman and make a public appearance. I hope, for your sake, that your late friends are not too active on that occasion."

The rows of identical faces nodded affirmation.

IDEALS DIE HARD

by Isaac Asimov





Finding the formula for peace is not easy. Two men may agree on the object but be in violent disagreement as to the means

IN THE GREAT COURT, WHICH stands as a patch of untouched peace among the fifty busy square miles devoted to the towering buildings that are the pulse beat of the United Worlds of the Galaxy, stands a statue.

It stands where it can look at the stars at night. There are other statues ringing the court, but this one stands in the centre and alone.

It is not a very good statue. The face is too noble and lacks the lines of living. The brow is a shade too high, the nose a shade too straight, the clothing a shade too carefully disposed. The whole bearing is by far too saintly to be true. One can suppose that the man in real life might have frowned at times, or hiccupped, but the statue seemed to insist

that such imperfections were impossible.

All this, of course, is understandable overcompensation. The man had no statues raised to him while alive, and succeeding generations, with the advantage of hindsight, felt guilty.

The name on the pedestal reads "Richard Sayama Altmayer." Underneath it is a short phrase and, vertically arranged, three dates. The phrase is: "*In a good cause, there are no failures.*" The three dates are June 17, 2755; September 5, 2788; December 21, 3000—the years being counted in the usual manner of the period, that is, from the date of the first atomic explosion in 1944 of the ancient era.

None of those dates represents either his birth or death. They mark neither a date of marriage or of the accomplishment of some great deed or, indeed, of anything that the inhabitants of the United Worlds can remember with pleasure and pride. Rather, they are the final expression of the feeling of guilt.

Quite simply and plainly, they are the three dates upon which Richard Sayama Altmayer was sent to prison for his opinions.

I—June 17, 2755

At the age of twenty-two, certainly, Dick Altmayer was fully capable of feeling fury. His hair was as yet dark brown and he had not grown the moustache

which, in later years, would be so characteristic of him. His nose was, of course, thin and high-bridged, but the contours of his face were youthful. It would only be later that the growing gauntness of his cheeks would convert that nose into the prominent landmark that it now is in the minds of trillions of schoolchildren.

Geoffrey Stock was standing in the doorway, viewing the results of his friend's fury. His round face and cold, steady eyes were there, but he had yet to put on the first of the military uniforms in which he was to spend the rest of his life.

He said: "Great Galaxy!"

Altmayer looked up. "Hello, Jeff."

"What's been happening, Dick? I thought your principles, pal, forbid destruction of any kind. Here's a book-viewer that looks somewhat destroyed." He picked up the pieces.

Altmayer said: "I was holding the viewer when my wave-receiver came through with an official message. You know which one, too."

"I know. It happened to me, too. Where is it?"

"On the floor. I tore it off the spool as soon as it belched out at me. Wait, let's dump it down the atom chute."

"Hey, hold on. You can't—."

"Why not?"

"Because you won't accomplish

anything. You'll have to report."

"And just why?"

"Don't be an ass, Dick."

"This is a matter of principle, by Space."

"Oh, nuts! You can't fight the whole planet."

"I don't intend to fight the whole planet; just the few who get us into wars."

Stock shrugged. "That means the whole planet. That guff of yours of leaders tricking poor innocent people into fighting is just so much space-dust. Do you think that if a vote were taken the people wouldn't be overwhelmingly in favour of fighting this fight?"

"That means nothing, Jeff. The government has control of——"

"The organs of propaganda. Yes, I know. I've listened to you often enough. But why not report, anyway?"

Altmayer turned away.

Stock said: "In the first place, you might not pass the physical examination."

"I'd pass. I've been in Space."

"That doesn't mean anything. If the doctors let you hop a liner, that only means you don't have a heart murmur or an aneurysm. For military duty aboard ship in Space you need much more than just that. How do you know you qualify?"

"That's a side issue, Jeff, and an insulting one. It's not that I'm afraid to fight."

"Do you think you can stop the war this way?"

"I wish I could," Altmayer's voice almost shook as he spoke. "It's this idea I have that all mankind should be a single unit. There shouldn't be wars or space-fleets armed only for destruction. The Galaxy stands ready to be opened to the united efforts of the human race. Instead, we have been factioned for nearly two thousand years, and we throw away all the Galaxy."

Stock laughed. "We're doing all right. There are more than eighty independent planetary systems."

"And are we the only intelligences in the Galaxy?"

"Oh, the Diaboli, your particular devils," and Stock put his fists to his temples and extended the two forefingers, wagging them.

"And yours, too, and everybody's. They have a single government extending over more planets than all those occupied by our precious eighty independents."

"Sure, and their nearest planet is only fifteen hundred light years away, and they can't live on oxygen planets anyway."

Stock got out of his friendly mood. He said, curtly: "Look, I dropped by here to say that I was reporting for examination next week. Are you coming with me?"

"No."

"You're really determined."

"I'm really determined."

"You know you'll accomplish

nothing. There'll be no great flame ignited on Earth. It will be no case of millions of young men being excited by your example into a no-war strike. You will simply be put in jail."

"Well, then, jail it is."

And jail it was. On June 17, 2755, of the atomic era, after a short trial in which Richard Sayama Altmayer refused to present any defence, he was sentenced to jail for the term of three years or for the duration of the war, whichever should be longer. He served a little over four years and two months, at which time the war ended in a definite though not shattering Santannian defeat. Earth gained complete control of certain disputed asteroids, various commercial advantages, and a limitation of the Santannian navy.

The combined human losses of the war were something over two thousand ships with, of course, most of their crews, and in addition, several millions of lives due to the bombardment of planetary surfaces from space. The fleets of the two contending powers had been sufficiently strong to restrict this bombardment to the outposts of their respective systems, so that the planets of Earth and Santanni, themselves, were little affected.

The war conclusively established Earth as the strongest single human military power.

Geoffrey Stock fought through-

out the war, seeing action more than once and remaining whole in life and limb despite that. At the end of the war he had the rank of major. He took part in the first diplomatic mission sent out by Earth to the worlds of the Diaboli, and that was the first step in his expanding role in Earth's military and political life.

2—September 5, 2788

They were the first Diaboli ever to have appeared on the surface of Earth itself. The projection posters and the newscasts of the Federalist party made that abundantly clear to any who were unaware of that. Over and over, they repeated the chronology of events.

It was towards the beginning of the century that human explorers first came across the Diaboli. They were intelligent and had discovered interstellar travel independently somewhat earlier than had the humans. Already the galactic volume of their dominions was greater than that which was human-occupied.

Regular diplomatic relationships between the Diaboli and the major human powers had begun twenty years earlier, immediately after the war between Santanni and Earth. At that time, outposts of Diaboli power were already within twenty light years of human centres. Their missions went everywhere, drawing trade

treaties, obtaining concessions on unoccupied asteroids.

And now they were on Earth itself. They were treated as equals and perhaps as more than equals by the rulers of the greatest centre of human population in the Galaxy. The most damning statistic of all was the most loudly proclaimed by the Federalists. It was this: Although the number of living Diaboli was somewhat less than the total number of living humans, humanity had opened up not more than five new worlds to colonization in fifty years, while the Diaboli had begun the occupation of nearly five hundred.

"A hundred to one against us," cried the Federalists, "because they are one political organization and we are a hundred." But relatively few on Earth, and fewer in the Galaxy as a whole, paid attention to the Federalists and their demands for Galactic Union.

The crowds that lined the streets along which nearly daily the five Diaboli of the mission travelled from their specially conditioned suite in the best hotel of the city to the Secretariat of Defence were, by and large, not hostile. Most were merely curious, and more than a little revolted.

The Diaboli were not pleasant creatures to look at. They were larger and considerably more massive than Earthmen. They had four stubby legs set close together below and two flexibly-fingered

arms above. Their skin was wrinkled and naked and they wore no clothing. Their broad, scaly faces wore no expressions capable of being read by Earthmen, and from flattened regions just above each large-pupilled eye there sprang short horns. It was these last that gave the creatures their names. At first they had been called devils, and later the politer Latin equivalent.

Each wore a pair of cylinders on its back from which flexible tubes extended to the nostrils; there they clamped on tightly. These were packed with soda-lime which absorbed the, to them, poisonous carbon dioxide from the air they breathed. Their own metabolism revolved about the reduction of sulphur and sometimes those foremost among the humans in the crowd caught a foul whiff of the hydrogen sulphide exhaled by the Diaboli.

The leader of the Federalists was in the crowd. He stood far back where he attracted no attention from the police, who had roped off the avenues and who now maintained a watchful order on the little hoppers that could be manœuvred quickly through the thickest crowd. The Federalist leader was gaunt-faced, with a thin and prominently bridged nose and straight, greying hair.

He turned away. "I cannot bear to look at them."

His companion was more philo-

sophic. He said: "No uglier in spirit, at least, than some of our handsome officials. These creatures are at least true to their own."

"You are sadly right. Are we entirely ready?"

"Entirely. There won't be one of them alive to return to his world."

"Good! I will remain here to give the signal."

The Diaboli were talking as well. This fact could not be evident to any human, no matter how close. To be sure, they could communicate by making ordinary sounds to one another but that was not their method of choice. The skin between their horns could, by the actions of muscles which differed in their construction from any known to humans, vibrate rapidly. The tiny waves which were transmitted in this manner to the air were too rapid to be heard by the human ear and too delicate to be detected by any but the most sensitive of human instrumentation. At that time, in fact, humans remained unaware of this form of communication.

A vibration said: "Did you know that this is the planet of origin of the Two-legs?"

"No." There was a chorus of such no's, and then one particular vibration said: "Do you get that from the Two-leg communications you have been studying, queer one?"

"Because I study the communications? More of our people should do so instead of insisting so firmly on the complete worthlessness of Two-leg culture. For one thing, we are in a much better position to deal with the Two-legs if we know something about them. Their history is interesting in a horrible way. I am glad I brought myself to view their spools."

"And yet," came another vibration, "from our previous contacts with Two-legs, one would be certain that they did not know their planet of origin. Certainly there is no veneration of this planet, Earth, or any memorial rites connected with it. Are you sure the information is correct?"

"Entirely so. The lack of ritual, and the fact that this planet is by no means a shrine, is perfectly understandable in the light of Two-leg history. The Two-legs on the other worlds would scarcely concede the honour. It would somehow lower the independent dignity of their own worlds."

"I don't quite understand."

"Neither do I, exactly, but after several days of reading I think I catch a glimmer. It would seem that, originally, when interstellar travel was first discovered by the Two-legs, they lived under a single political unit."

"Naturally."

"Not for these Two-legs. This was an unusual stage in their history and did not last. After the

colonies on the various worlds grew and came to reasonable maturity, their first interest was to break away from the mother world. The first in the series of interstellar wars among these Two-legs began then."

"Horrible. Like cannibals."

"Yes, isn't it? My digestion has been upset for days. My cud is sour. In any case, the various colonies gained independence, so that now we have the situation of which we are well aware. All of the Two-leg kingdoms, republics, aristocracies, etc., are simply tiny clots of worlds, each consisting of a dominant world and a few subsidiaries which, in turn, are forever seeking their independence or being shifted from one dominant to another. This Earth is the strongest among them and yet less than a dozen worlds owe it allegiance."

"Incredible that these creatures should be so blind to their own interests. Do they not have a tradition of the single government that existed when they consisted of but one world?"

"As I said that was unusual for them. The single government had existed only a few decades. Prior to that, this very planet itself was split into a number of sub-planetary political units."

"Never heard anything like it." For a while, the supersonics of the various creatures interfered with one another.

"It's a fact. It is simply the nature of the beast."

And with that, they were at the Secretariat of Defence.

The five Diaboli stood side by side along the table. They stood because their anatomy did not admit of anything that would correspond to "sitting." On the other side of the table, five Earthmen stood as well. It would have been more convenient for the humans to sit but, understandably, there was no desire to make the handicap of smaller size any more pronounced than it already was. The table was a rather wide one; the widest, in fact, that could be conveniently obtained. This was out of respect for the human nose, for from the Diaboli, slightly so as they breathed, much more so when they spoke, there came the gentle and continuous drift of hydrogen sulphide. This was a difficulty rather unprecedented in diplomatic negotiations.

Ordinarily the meetings did not last for more than half an hour, and at the end of this interval the Diaboli ended their conversations without ceremony and turned to leave. This time, however, the leave-taking was interrupted. A man entered, and the five human negotiators made way for him. He was tall, taller than any of the other Earthmen, and he wore a uniform with the ease of long usage. His face was round and his eyes cold and steady. His black

hair was rather thin but as yet untouched by grey. There was an irregular blotch of scar tissue running from the point of his jaw downward past the line of his high leather-brown collar. It might have been the result of a hand energy-ray, wielded by some forgotten human enemy in one of the five wars in which the man had been an active participant.

"Sirs," said the Earthman who had been chief negotiator hitherto, "may I introduce the Secretary of Defence?"

The Diaboli were somewhat shocked and, although their expressions were in repose and inscrutable, the sound plates on their foreheads vibrated actively. Their strict sense of hierarchy was disturbed. The Secretary was only a Two-leg, but by Two-leg standards, he outranked them. They could not properly conduct official business with him.

The Secretary was aware of their feelings but had no choice in the matter. For at least ten minutes, their leaving must be delayed and no ordinary interruption could serve to hold back the Diaboli.

"Sirs," he said, "I must ask your indulgence to remain longer this time."

The central Diabolus replied in the nearest approach to English any Diabolus could manage. Actually, a Diabolus might be said to have two mouths. One was hinged at the outermost extremity

of the jawbone and was used in eating. In this capacity, the motion of the mouth was rarely seen by human beings, since the Diaboli much preferred to eat in the company of their own kind, exclusively. A narrower mouth opening, however, perhaps two inches in width, could be used in speaking. It pursed itself open, revealing the gummy gap where a Diabolus' missing incisors ought to have been. It remained open during speech, the necessary consonantal blockings being performed by the palate and back of the tongue. The result was hoarse and fuzzy, but understandable.

The Diabolus said: "You will pardon us, already we suffer." And by his forehead, he twittered unheard: "They mean to suffocate us in their vile atmosphere. We must ask for larger poison-absorbing cylinders."

The Secretary of Defence said: "I am in sympathy with your feelings, and yet this may be my only opportunity to speak with you. Perhaps you would do us the honour to eat with us."

The Earthman next the Secretary could not forbear a quick and passing frown. He scribbled rapidly on a piece of paper and passed it to the Secretary, who glanced momentarily at it.

It read: "No. They eat sulphuretted hay. Stinks unbearably." The Secretary crumpled the note and let it drop.

The Diabolus said: "The honour is ours. Were we physically able to endure your strange atmosphere for so long a time, we would accept most gratefully."

And via forehead, he said, with agitation: "They cannot expect us to eat with them and watch them consume the corpses of dead animals. My cud would never be sweet again."

"We respect your reasons," said the Secretary. "Let us then transact our business now. In the negotiations that have so far proceeded, we have been unable to obtain from your government, in the persons of you, their representatives, any clear indication as to what the boundaries of your sphere of influence are in your own minds. We have presented several proposals in this matter."

"As far as the territories of Earth are concerned, Mr. Secretary, a definition has been given."

"But surely you must see that this is unsatisfactory. The boundaries of Earth and your lands are nowhere in contact. So far, you have done nothing but state this fact. While true, the mere statement is not satisfying."

"We do not completely understand. Would you have us discuss the boundaries between ourselves and such independent human kingdoms as that of Vega?"

"Why, yes."

"That cannot be done, sir.

Surely, you realize that any relations between ourselves and the sovereign realm of Vega cannot be possibly any concern of Earth. They can be discussed only with Vega."

"Then you will negotiate a hundred times with the hundred human world systems?"

"It is necessary. I would point out, however, that the necessity is imposed not by us but by the nature of your human organization."

"Then that limits our field of discussion drastically." The Secretary seemed abstracted. He was listening, not exactly to the Diaboli opposite, but, rather, it would seem, to something at a distance.

And now there was a faint commotion, barely heard from outside the Secretariat. The babble of distant voices, the brisk crackle of energy-guns muted by distance to nearly nothingness, and the hurried click-clacking of police hoppers.

The Diaboli showed no indication of hearing, nor was this simply another affectation of politeness. If their capacity for receiving supersonic sound waves was far more delicate and acute than almost anything human ingenuity had ever invented, their reception for ordinary sound waves was rather dull

The Diabolus was saying: "We beg leave to state our surprise.

We were of the opinion that all this was known to you."

A man in police uniform appeared in the doorway. The Secretary turned to him and, with the briefest of nods, the policeman departed.

The Secretary said suddenly and briskly: "Quite. I merely wished to ascertain once again that this was the case. I trust you will be ready to resume negotiations tomorrow?"

"Certainly, sir."

One by one, slowly, with a dignity befitting the heirs of the universe, the Diaboli left.

An Earthman said: "I'm glad they refused to eat with us."

"I knew they couldn't accept," said the Secretary, thoughtfully. "They're vegetarian. They sicken thoroughly at the very thought of eating meat. I've seen them eat, you know. Not many humans have. They resemble our cattle in the business of eating. They bolt their food and then stand solemnly about in circles, chewing their cuds in a great community of thought. Perhaps they intercommunicate by a method we are unaware of. The huge lower jaw rotates horizontally in a slow, grinding process—"

The policeman had once more appeared in the doorway.

The Secretary broke off, and called: "You have them all?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you have Altmayer?"

"Yes, sir"

"Good."

The crowd had gathered again when the five Diaboli emerged from the Secretariat. The schedule was strict. At 3.00 p.m. each day they left their suite and spent five minutes walking to the Secretariat. At 3.35, they emerged therefrom once again and returned to their suite, the way being kept clear by the police. They marched stolidly, almost mechanically, along the broad avenue.

Halfway in their trek there came the sounds of shouting men. To most of the crowd, the words were not clear but there was the crackle of an energy-gun and the pale blue fluorescence split the air overhead. Police wheeled, their own energy-guns drawn, hoppers springing seven feet into the air, landing delicately in the midst of groups of people, touching none of them, jumping again almost instantly. People scattered and their voices were joined to the general uproar.

Through it all, the Diaboli, either through defective hearing or excessive dignity, continued marching as mechanically as ever.

At the other end of the gathering, almost diametrically opposing the region of excitement, Richard Sayama Altmayer stroked his nose in a moment of satisfaction. The strict chronology of the Diaboli had made a split-second

plan possible. The first diversionary disturbance was only to attract the attention of the police. It was now—

And he fired a harmless sound pellet into the air.

Instantly, from four directions, concussion pellets split the air. From the roofs of buildings lining the way, snipers fired.

Each of the Diaboli, torn by shells, shuddered and exploded as the pellets detonated within them. One by one, they toppled.

And from nowhere, the police were at Altmayer's side. He stared at them with some surprise.

Gently, for in twenty years he had lost his fury and learned to be gentle, he said: "You come quickly, but even so you come too late." He gestured in the direction of the shattered Diaboli.

The crowd was in simple panic now. Additional squadrons of police, arriving in record time, could do nothing more than herd them off into harmless directions.

The policeman, who now held Altmayer in a firm grip, taking the sound gun from him and inspecting him quickly for further weapons, was a captain by rank. He said, stiffly: "I think you've made a mistake, Mr. Altmayer. You'll notice you've drawn no blood." And he, too, waved toward where the Diaboli lay motionless.

Altmayer turned, startled. The creatures lay there on their sides, some in pieces, tattered skin

shredding away, frames distorted and bent, but the police captain was correct. There was no blood, no flesh. Altmayer's lips, pale and stiff, moved soundlessly.

The police captain interpreted the motion accurately enough. He said: "You are correct, sir, they are robots."

And from the great doors of the Secretariat of Defence, the true Diaboli emerged. Clubbing policemen cleared the way, but another way, so that they need not pass the sprawled travesties of plastic and aluminium which for three minutes had played the role of living creatures.

The police captain said: "I'll ask you to come without trouble, Mr. Altmayer. The Secretary of Defence would like to see you."

"I am coming, sir." A stunned frustration was only now beginning to overwhelm him.

Geoffrey Stock and Richard Altmayer faced one another for the first time in almost a quarter of a century, there in the Defence Secretary's private office. It was a rather strait-laced office: a desk, an armchair, and two additional chairs. All were a dull brown in colour, the chairs being topped by blown foamite which yielded to the body enough for comfort, not enough for luxury. There was a micro-viewer on the desk and a little cabinet big enough to hold several dozen opto-spools. On the

wall opposite the desk was a tri-dimensional view of the old *Dauntless*, the Secretary's first command.

Stock said: "It is a little ridiculous meeting like this after so many years. I find I am sorry."

"Sorry about what, Jeff?" Altmayer tried to force a smile. "I am sorry about nothing but that you tricked me with those robots."

"You were not difficult to trick," said Stock, "and it was an excellent opportunity to break your party. I'm sure it will be quite discredited after this. The pacifist tries to force war; the apostle of gentleness tries assassination."

"War against the true enemy," said Altmayer sadly. "But you are right. It is a sign of desperation that this was forced on me." Then: "How did you know my plans?"

"You still overestimate humanity, Dick. In any conspiracy the weakest points are the people that compose it. You had twenty-five co-conspirators. Didn't it occur to you that at least one of them might be an informer, or even an employee of mine?"

A dull red burned slowly on Altmayer's high cheekbones. "Which one?" he said.

"Sorry. We may have to use him again."

Altmayer sat back in his chair wearily. "What have you gained?"

"What have *you* gained? You are as impractical now as on that last day I saw you; the day you

decided to go to jail rather than report for induction. You haven't changed."

Altmayer shook his head. "The truth doesn't change."

Stock said, impatiently: "If it is truth, why does it always fail? Your stay in jail accomplished nothing. The war went on. Not one life was saved. Since then, you've started a political party; and every cause it has backed has failed. Your conspiracy has failed. You're nearly fifty, Dick, and what have you accomplished? Nothing."

Altmayer said: "And you went to war, rose to command a ship, then to a place in the Cabinet. They say you will be the next Coordinator. You've accomplished a great deal. Yet success and failure do not exist in themselves. Success in what? Success in working the ruin of humanity. Failure in what? In saving it? I wouldn't change places with you. Jeff, remember this. In a good cause, there are no failures; there are only delayed successes."

"Even if you are executed for this day's work?"

"Even if I am executed. There will be someone else to carry on, and his success will be my success."

"How do you envisage this success? Can you really see a union of worlds, a Galactic Federation? Do you want Santanni running our affairs? Do you want a Vegan telling you what to do? Do you

want Earth to decide its own destiny or to be at the mercy of any random combination of powers?"

"We would be at their mercy no more than they would be at ours."

"Except that we are the richest. We would be plundered for the sake of the depressed worlds of the Sirius Sector."

"And pay the plunder out of what we would save in the wars that would no longer occur."

"Do you have answers for all questions, Dick?"

"In twenty years we have been asked all questions, Jeff."

"Then answer this one. How would you force this union of yours on unwilling humanity?"

"That is why I wanted to kill the Diaboli." For the first time, Altmayer showed agitation. "It would mean war with them, but all humanity would unite against the common enemy. Our own political and ideological differences would fade in the face of that."

"You really believe that? Even when the Diaboli have never harmed us? They cannot live on our worlds. They must remain on their own worlds of sulphide atmosphere and oceans which are sodium sulphate solutions."

"Humanity knows better, Jeff. They are spreading from world to world like an atomic explosion. They block space travel into

regions where there are unoccupied oxygen worlds, the kind we could use. They are planning for the future—making room for uncounted future generations of Diaboli, while we are being restricted to one corner of the Galaxy, and fighting ourselves to death. In a thousand years we will be their slaves; in ten thousand we will be extinct. Oh, yes, they are the common enemy. Mankind knows that. You will find that out sooner than you think, perhaps."

The Secretary said: "Your party members speak a great deal of ancient Greece of the pre-atomic age. They tell us that the Greeks were a marvellous people, the most culturally advanced of their time, perhaps of all times. They set mankind on the road it has never yet left entirely. They had only one flaw. They could not unite. They were conquered and eventually died out. And we follow in their footsteps now, eh?"

"You have learned your lesson well, Jeff."

"But have you, Dick?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did the Greeks have no common enemy against whom they could unite?"

Altmayer was silent.

Stock said: "The Greeks fought Persia, their great common enemy. Was it not a fact that a good proportion of the Greek states fought on the Persian side?"

Altmayer said finally: "Yes.

Because they thought Persian victory was inevitable and they wanted to be on the winning side."

"Human beings haven't changed, Dick. Why do you suppose the Diaboli are here? What is it we are discussing?"

"I am not a member of the government."

"No," said Stock, savagely, "but I am. The Vegan League has allied itself with the Diaboli."

"I don't believe you. It can't be."

"It can be and is. The Diaboli have agreed to supply them with five hundred ships at any time they happen to be at war with Earth. In return, Vega abandons all claims to the Nigellian star cluster. So if you had really assassinated the Diaboli, it would have been war, but with half of humanity probably fighting on the side of your so-called common enemy. We are trying to prevent that."

Altmayer said, slowly: "I am ready for trial. Or am I to be executed without one?"

Stock said: "You are still foolish. If we shoot you, Dick, we make a martyr. If we keep you alive and shoot only your subordinates, you will be suspected of having turned state's evidence. As a presumed traitor, you will be quite harmless in the future."

And so, on September 5th, 2788, Richard Sayama Altmayer, after the briefest of secret trials,

was sentenced to five years in prison. He served his full term. The year he emerged from prison, Geoffrey Stock was elected Co-ordinator of Earth.

3—December 21, 3000

Simon Devoire was not at ease. He was a little man, with sandy hair and a freckled, ruddy face. He said: "I'm sorry I agreed to see you, Altmayer. It won't do you any good. It might do me harm."

Altmayer said: "I am an old man. I won't hurt you." And he was, indeed, a very old man somehow. The turn of the millennium found his years at two thirds of a century, but he was older than that, older inside and older outside. His clothes were too big for him, as if he were shrinking away inside them. Only his nose had not aged; it was still the thin, aristocratic, high-beaked Altmayer nose.

Devoire said: "It's not you I'm afraid of."

"Why not? Perhaps you think I betrayed the men of '88."

"No, of course not. No man of sense believes that you did. But the days of the Federalists are over, Altmayer."

Altmayer tried to smile. He felt a little hungry; he hadn't eaten that day—no time for food. Was the day of the Federalists over? It might seem so to others. The movement had died on a wave of

ridicule. A conspiracy that fails, a "lost cause," is often romantic. It is remembered and draws adherents for generations, if the loss is at least a dignified one. But to shoot at living creatures and find the mark to be robots; to be outmanœuvred and outfoxed; to be made ridiculous—that is deadly. It is deadlier than treason, wrong, and sin. Not many had believed Altmayer had bargained for his life by betraying his associates, but the universal laughter killed Federalism as effectively as though they had.

But Altmayer had remained stolidly stubborn under it all. He said: "The day of the Federalists will never be over, while the human race lives."

"Words," said Devoire impatiently. "They meant more to men when I was younger. I am a little tired now."

"Simon, I need access to the subetheric system."

Devoire's face hardened. He said: "And you thought of me. I'm sorry, Altmayer, but I can't let you use my broadcasts for your own purposes."

"You were a Federalist once."

"Don't rely on that," said Devoire. "That's in the past. Now I am—nothing. I am a Devoirist, I suppose. I want to live."

"Even if it is under the feet of the Diaboli? Do you want to live when they are willing; die when they are ready?"

"Words!"

"Do you approve of the all-Galactic conference?"

Devoire reddened past his usual pink level. He gave the sudden impression of a man with too much blood for his body. He said, smoulderingly: "Well, why not? What does it matter how we go about establishing the Federation of Man? If you're still a Federalist, what have you to object to in a united humanity?"

"United under the Diaboli?"

"What's the difference? Humanity can't unite by itself. Let us be driven to it, as long as the fact is accomplished. I am sick of it all, Altmayer, sick of all our stupid history. I'm tired of trying to be an idealist with nothing to be idealistic over. Human beings are human beings and that's the nasty part of it. Maybe we've got to be whipped into line. If so, I'm perfectly willing to let the Diaboli do the whipping."

Altmayer said gently: "You're very foolish, Devoire. It won't be a real union, you know that. The Diaboli called this conference so that they might act as umpires on all current interhuman disputes to their own advantage, and remain the supreme court of judgment over us hereafter. You know they have no intention of establishing a real central human government. It will only be a sort of interlocking directorate; each human government will conduct its own affairs

as before and pull in various directions as before. It is simply that we will grow accustomed to running to the Diaboli with our little problems."

"How do you know that will be the result?"

"Do you seriously think any other result is possible?"

Devoire chewed at his lower lip. "Maybe not!"

"Then see through a pane of glass, Simon. Any true independence we now have will be lost."

"A lot of good this independence has ever done us. Besides, what's the use? We can't stop this thing. Co-ordinator Stock is probably no keener on the conference than you are, but that doesn't help him. If Earth doesn't attend, the union will be formed without us, and then we will face war with the rest of humanity and the Diaboli. And that goes for any other government that wants to back out."

"What if *all* the governments back out? Wouldn't the conference break up completely?"

"Have you ever known all the human governments to do *anything* together? You never learn, Altmayer."

"There are new facts involved."

"Such as? I know I am foolish for asking, but go ahead."

Altmayer said: "For twenty years most of the Galaxy has been shut to human ships. You

know that. None of us has the slightest notion of what goes on within the Diaboli sphere of influence. And yet some human colonies exist within that sphere."

"So?"

"So occasionally human beings escape into the small portion of the Galaxy that remains human and free. The government of Earth receives reports; reports which they don't dare make public. But not *all* officials of the government can stand the cowardice involved in such actions for ever. One of them has been to see me. I can't tell you which one, of course—so I have documents, Devoire; official, reliable, and true."

Devoire shrugged. "About what?" He turned the desk chronometer rather ostentatiously so that Altmayer could see its gleaming metal face on which the red, glowing figures stood out sharply. They read 22.31, and even as it was turned, the 1 faded and the new glow of a 2 appeared.

Altmayer said: "There is a planet called by its colonists Chu Hsi. It did not have a large population; two million, perhaps. Fifteen years ago the Diaboli occupied worlds on various sides of it; and in all those fifteen years, no human ship ever landed on the planet. Last year the Diaboli themselves landed. They brought with them huge freight ships filled with sodium sulphate and bacterial

cultures that are native to their own worlds."

"What? You can't make me believe it."

"Try," said Altmayer, ironically. "It is not difficult. Sodium sulphate will dissolve in the oceans of any world. In a sulphate ocean, their bacteria will grow, multiply, and produce hydrogen sulphide in tremendous quantities which will fill the oceans and the atmosphere. They can then introduce their plants and animals and eventually themselves. Another planet will be suitable for Diaboli life—and unsuitable for any human. It would take time, surely, but the Diaboli have time. They are a united people and . . ."

"Now, look," Devoire waved his hand in disgust, "that just doesn't hold water. The Diaboli have more worlds than they know what to do with."

"For their present purposes, yes, but the Diaboli are creatures that look toward the future. Their birth-rate is high and eventually they will fill the Galaxy. And how much better off they would be if they were the only intelligence in the universe."

"But it's impossible on purely physical grounds. Do you know how many millions of tons of sodium sulphate it would take to fill up the oceans to their requirements?"

- "Obviously a planetary supply."

"Well, then, do you suppose

they would strip one of their own worlds to create a new one? Where is the gain?"

"Simon, Simon, there are millions of planets in the Galaxy which through atmospheric conditions, temperature, or gravity are for ever uninhabitable, either to humans or to Diaboli. Many of these are quite adequately rich in sulphur."

Devoire considered. "What about the human beings on the planet?"

"On Chu Hsi? Euthanasia—except for the few who escaped in time. Painless, I suppose. The Diaboli are not needlessly cruel, merely efficient."

Altmayer waited. Devoire's fist clenched and unclenched.

Altmayer said: "Publish this news. Spread it out on the interstellar subetheric web. Broadcast the documents to the reception centres on the various worlds. You can do it, and when you do, the all-Galactic conference will fall apart."

Devoire's chair tilted forward. He stood up. "Where's your proof?"

"Will you do it?"

"I want to see your proof."

Altmayer smiled. "Come with me."

They were waiting for him when he came back to the furnished room he was living in. He didn't notice them at first. He was com-

pletely unaware of the small vehicle that followed him at a slow pace and a prudent distance. He walked with his head bent, calculating the length of time it would take for Devoire to put the information through the reaches of Space; how long it would take for the receiving stations on Vega and Santanni and Centaurus to blast out the news; how long it would take to turn over the entire Galaxy. And in this way he passed, unheeding, between the two plain-clothes men who flanked the entrance of the rooming house.

It was only when he opened the door to his own room that he stopped and turned to leave, but the plain-clothes men were behind him now. He made no attempt at violent escape. He entered the room instead and sat down, feeling so old. He thought feverishly, I need only hold them off an hour and ten minutes.

The man who occupied the darkness reached up and flicked the switch that allowed the wall lights to operate. In the soft wall glow, the man's round face and balding grey-fringed head were startlingly clear.

Altmayer said gently: "I am honoured with a visit by the Coordinator himself."

And Stock said: "We are old friends, you and I, Dick. We meet every once in a while."

Altmayer did not answer.

Stock said: "You have certain government papers in your possession, Dick."

Altmayer said: "If you think so, Jeff, you'll have to find them."

Stock rose wearily to his feet. "No heroics, Dick. Let me tell you what those papers contained. They were circumstantial reports of the sulphation of the planet Chu Hsi. Isn't that true?"

Altmayer looked at the clock.

Stock said: "If you are planning to delay us, to angle us as though we were fish, you will be disappointed. We know where you've been, we know Devoire has the papers, we know exactly what he's planning to do with them."

Altmayer stiffened. The thin parchment of his cheeks trembled. He said: "How long have you known?"

"As long as you have, Dick. You are a very predictable man. It is the very reason we decided to use you. Do you suppose the Recorder would really come to see you as he did without our knowledge?"

"I don't understand."

Stock said: "The Government of Earth, Dick, is not anxious that the all-Galactic conference be continued. However, we are not Federalists; we know humanity for what it is. What do you suppose would happen if the rest of the Galaxy discovered that the Diaboli were in the process of

changing a salt-oxygen world into a sulphate-sulphide one?

"No, don't answer. You are Dick Altmayer and I'm sure you'd tell me that with one fiery burst of indignation, they'd abandon the conference, join together in a loving and brotherly union, throw themselves at the Diaboli, and overwhelm them."

Stock paused such a long time that, for a moment, it might have seemed he would say no more. Then he continued in half a whisper. "Nonsense. They would say that the Government of Earth, for purposes of its own, had initiated a fraud, had forged documents in a deliberate attempt to disrupt the conference. The Diaboli would deny everything, and most of the human worlds would find it to their interests to believe the denial. They would concentrate on the iniquities of Earth and forget about the iniquities of the Diaboli. So you see, we could sponsor no such expose."

Altmayer felt drained, futile. "Then you will stop Devoire. It is always that you are so sure of failure beforehand; that you believe the worst of your fellow man—"

"Wait! I said nothing of stopping Devoire. I said only that the government could not sponsor such an expose and we will not. But the expose will take place just the same, except that afterward

we will arrest Devoire and yourself and denounce the whole thing as vehemently as will the Diaboli. The whole affair would then be changed. The Government of Earth will have dissociated itself from the claims. It will then seem to the rest of the human government that, for our own selfish purposes, we are trying to hide the actions of the Diaboli, that we have, perhaps, a special understanding with them. They will fear that special understanding and unite against us. But *then* to be against us will mean that they are also against the Diaboli. They will insist on believing the expose to be the truth, the documents to be real—and the conference will break up."

"It will mean war again," said Altmayer hopelessly, "and not against the real enemy. It will mean fighting among the humans, and a victory all the greater for the Diaboli when it is all over."

"No war," said Stock. "No government will attack Earth with the Diaboli on our side. The other governments will merely draw away from us and grind a permanent anti-Diaboli bias into their propaganda. Later, if there should be war between ourselves and the Diaboli, the other governments will at least remain neutral."

He looks very old, thought Altmayer. We are all old, dying men. Aloud, he said: "Why would you expect the Diaboli to

back Earth? You may fool the rest of mankind by pretending to attempt suppression of the facts concerning the planet Chu Hsi, but you won't fool the Diaboli. They won't for a moment believe Earth to be sincere in its claim that it believes the documents to be forgeries."

"Ah, but they will." Geoffrey Stock stood up. "You see, the documents *are* forgeries. The Diaboli may be planning sulphation of planets in the future, but to our knowledge, they have not tried it yet."

On December 21, 3000, Richard Sayama Altmayer entered prison for the third and last time. There was no trial, no definite sentence, and scarcely a real imprisonment in the literal sense of the word. His movements were confined and only a few officials were allowed to communicate with him, but otherwise his comforts were looked to assiduously. He had no access to news, of course, so that he was not aware that in the second year of this third imprisonment of his, the war between Earth and the Diaboli opened with the surprise attack near Sirius by an Earth squadron upon certain ships of the Diaboli navy.

In 3002, Geoffrey Stock came to visit Altmayer in his confinement. Altmayer rose in surprise to greet him.

"You're looking well, Dick," Stock said.

He himself was not. His complexion had greyed. He still wore his naval captain's uniform, but his body stooped slightly within it. He was to die within the year, a fact of which he was not completely unaware. It did not bother him much. He thought repeatedly, I have lived the years I've had to live.

Altmayer, who looked the older of the two, had yet more than nine years to live. He said: "An unexpected pleasure, Jeff, but this time you can't have come to imprison me. I'm in prison already."

"I've come to set you free, if you would like."

"For what purpose, Jeff? Surely you have a purpose? A clever way of using me?"

Stock's smile was merely a momentary twitch. He said: "A way of using you, truly, but this time you will approve . . . We are at war."

"With whom?" Altmayer was startled.

"With the Diaboli. We have been at war for six months."

Altmayer brought his hands together, thin fingers interlacing nervously. "I've heard nothing of this."

"I know." The Co-ordinator clasped his hands behind his back and was distantly surprised

to find that they were trembling. He said: "It's been a long journey for the two of us, Dick. We've had the same goal, you and I. No, let me speak. I've often wanted to explain my point of view to you, but you would never have understood. You weren't the kind of man to understand, until I had the results for you. I was twenty-five when I first visited a Diaboli world, Dick. I knew then it was either they or we."

"I said so," whispered Altmayer, "from the first."

"Merely saying so was not enough. You wanted to force the human governments to unite against them and that notion was politically unrealistic and completely impossible. It wasn't even desirable. Humans are not Diaboli. Among the Diaboli, individual consciousness is low, almost non-existent. Ours is almost overpowering. They have no such thing as politics; we have nothing else. They can never disagree, can have nothing but a single government. We can never agree; if we had a single island to live on, we would split it in three.

"But our very disagreements are our strength! Your Federalist party used to speak of ancient Greece a great deal once. Do you remember? But your people always missed the point. To be sure, Greece could never unite and was, therefore, ultimately conquered. But even in her state of

disunion, she defeated the gigantic Persian Empire. Why?

"I would like to point out that the Greek city-states over centuries had fought with one another. They were forced to specialize in things military to an extent far beyond the Persians. Even the Persians themselves realized that, and in the last century of their imperial existence, Greek mercenaries formed the most valued parts of their armies.

"The same might be said of the small nation-states of pre-atomic Europe, which in centuries of fighting had advanced their military arts to the point where they could overcome and hold for two hundred years the comparatively gigantic empires of Asia.

"So it is with us. The Diaboli, with vast extents of galactic space, have never fought a war. Their military machine is massive, but untried. In fifty years, only such advances have been made by them as they have been able to copy from the various human navies. Humanity, on the other hand, has competed ferociously in warfare. Each government has raced to keep ahead of its neighbours in military science. They've had to! It was our own disunion that made the terrible race for survival necessary, so that in the end almost any one of us was a match for all the Diaboli, provided only that none of us would fight on their side in a general war.

"It was toward the prevention of such a development that all of Earth's diplomacy has been aimed. Until it was certain that in a war between Earth and the Diaboli, the rest of humanity would be at least neutral, there could be no war, and no union of human governments could be allowed, since the race for military perfection must continue. Once we were sure of neutrality, through the hoax that broke up the conference two years ago, we sought the war, and now we have it."

Altmayer, through all this, might have been frozen. It was a long time before he could say anything.

Finally: "What if the Diaboli are victorious after all?"

Stock said: "They aren't. Two weeks ago, the main fleets joined action and theirs was annihilated with practically no loss to ourselves, although we were greatly outnumbered. We might have been fighting unarmed ships. We had stronger weapons of greater range and more accurate sighting. We had three times their effective speeds since we had anti-acceleration devices which they lacked. Since the battle a dozen of the other human governments have decided to join the winning side and have declared war on the Diaboli. Yesterday, the Diaboli requested that negotiations for an armistice be opened. The war is practically over; and henceforward the Dia-

boli will be confined to their original planets with only such future expansions as we permit."

Altmayer murmured incoherently.

Stock said: "And now union becomes necessary. After the defeat of Persia by the Greek city-states, they were ruined because of their continued wars among themselves, so that first Macedon and then Rome conquered them. After Europe colonized the Americas, cut up Africa, and conquered Asia, a series of continued European wars led to European partition and ruin.

"Disunion until conquest; union thereafter! But now union is easy. Let one subdivision succeed by itself and the rest will clamour to become part of that success. The ancient writer, Tonybee, first pointed out this difference between what he called a 'dominant minority' and a 'creative minority.'

"We are a creative minority now. In an almost spontaneous gesture, various human governments have suggested the formation of a United Worlds organization. Over seventy governments are willing to attend the first sessions in order to draw up a Charter of Federation. The others will join later, I am sure. We would like you to be one of the delegates from Earth, Dick."

Altmayer found his eyes flooding. "I—I don't understand your purpose. Is this all true?"

"It is all exactly as I say. You were a voice in the wilderness, Dick, crying for union. Your words will carry much weight. What did you once say: 'In a good cause, there are no failures'."

"No!" said Altmayer, with sudden energy. "It seems your cause was the good one."

Stock's face was hard and devoid of emotion. "You were always a misunderstander of human nature, Dick. When the United Worlds is a reality and when generations of men and women look back to these days of war through their centuries of unbroken peace, they will have forgotten the purpose of my

methods. To them they will represent war and death. Your calls for union, *your* idealism, will be remembered for ever."

He turned away and Altmayer barely caught his last words: "And when they build their statues, they will build none for me."

In the Great Court, which stands as a patch of untouched peace among the fifty busy square miles devoted to the towering buildings that are the pulse-beat of the United Worlds of the Galaxy, stands a statue . . .

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THE EVOLUTION OF MAN

by

KENNETH JOHNS

Part 6—NOT MAN, NOT APE

THE FINAL STAGES of the physical evolution of man were played out against the background of a slowly pulsating climate as the Earth rhythmically cooled and warmed during the last 620,000 years.

The Tertiary Period of the Age of Mammals ended and gave place to the Quaternary Period a million years ago, opening with the Pleistocene Epoch as the Earth convulsed in a mountain-building spasm. Then came the Great Ice Age, broken into four Ice Ages by the intervening warm interglacial periods. Even now we are not certain whether we are enjoying an intermission of a hundred thousand warm years before the Earth freezes again, or whether we are heading into another long, hot, dry period lasting a million or more years before the ice-mountains begin to march once more.

Four times the Earth froze in the Pleistocene and the broad, steel-blue sheets of ice crept down from the pole, and four times the ice hesitated, and withdrew, forcing ape-man and man alike to develop, adapt, shift and mingle before finally emerging as *Homo sapiens*.

Whether the South African ape-man died out in the geological crisis a million years ago, or whether he lasted until the beginning of the First Ice Age 620,000 years ago is not certain—all we know is that he died.

In that long distant past an animal that was not a man came down from the trees and began to walk upright on two legs. The causes behind this fundamental and far-reaching change were many and various and are not completely understood. But from fossil remains, from the painstaking study of animals in motion,

from surgical experiments carried out on generations of rats and monkeys leading to a shift in study from bones to muscles and from speculations on the environment at the time of this world-shaking event, we have a portion of the puzzle in our hands. Interpretation of the picture and juggling with the pieces to fit into an acceptable whole is still going on. Science is continually developing fresh tools with which to plumb the mysterious recesses of the past of man upon this globe.

Even before Dr. Broom had made his sensational discoveries, Dr. Dart was convinced that the skull of a six-year-old child, discovered near Taungs in South Africa, was that of an intermediate form. He termed it *Australopithecus africanus*. This is a clumsy term and means merely South African ape, and has nothing to do with Australia. The world scoffed and dubbed it "Dart's Baby." After considerable bother with authority, Broom went ahead and brought to light further adult specimens. What he discovered proved the scoffers hopelessly wrong.

The skulls were those of a type beyond the ape, but with a heavy, underslung jaw and protuberant brow ridges, necessary for the great muscles of the jaw to hinge upon. The canine teeth were much smaller than in apes, but larger

than in man and had been characteristically worn down as in man. The shape of the skull was fuller than in apes, although foreheads lay thousands of years in the future, cranial capacity being from 600 to 850 cubic centimetres, as against the 1,500 of modern man. Evidence to clinch the fact that these early ape-men were more closely related to man than the apes came from the fossil remains of bones connecting the skull with the neck, of the pelvis, and of fragments of thigh bone showing that an upright, bipedal gait had been adopted.

Although the pelvis is not quite human, it is still further removed from the ape pelvis. Gorillas, chimpanzees and orang utans have hip bones that are tall and slender, whilst in man, to allow an upright carriage, the pelvis has become low and broad. Also, in man the spine has undergone drastic remodelling. The "small of the back" is the lumbar curve, which enables the spine to start out from the pelvis at an angle and then to twist backwards and rise almost vertically to support the head. This development of the spine is peculiar to man and his closest relations—relations in time; it is not shared by the apes or monkeys.

Yet the ape-men of South Africa are the converse of early

ideas of the "missing link." Instead of the popular picture of an ape-bodied creature shambling around with the face and brain of a man, we find from these fossils that they had the brain and head of a near-ape, but the truly human—if slightly smaller and less perfect—body of a man. They were about four feet tall and weighed around eighty pounds, near the dimensions of the present Bushmen of South Africa.

For hundreds of thousands of years this family of primates, human in all save the size of their brains, lived and ran on two legs over the veldt of South Africa, dwelling for the most part in caves, and killing rabbit-like animals and baboons for food. Their tools were crude but effective. The most remarkable aspect of the human body evolving before the human brain pinpoints a critical factor in evolution—how did intelligence, the ability of an animal to think of itself as "I"—dawn? This is a problem whose answer is not clear yet.

These ape-men were the people who lifted themselves by their bootstraps to gain ascendancy over their environment through slowly dawning intelligence; but once again there was probably a strong physical reason for the change in the shape of their skull and low-browed, heavy-jawed brute to the flattish face and high foreheads we now possess.

When the apes left the trees they lost much of their relatively easy-to-obtain vegetable diet, and, becoming hunters, turned to meat as their main food supply. This change was probably dictated by a gradually drying climate killing off many trees.

Recently, Dr. Washburn has shown, experimentally, that the physical change from ape-man to *Homo sapiens* was far smaller than was once thought. Change in the use, and, therefore, the size of muscles automatically led to alterations in the bone structure and so survival of those best able to adapt and mutate in this direction. And it is the jaw muscle that controls the shape of the skull. Removal of the jaw muscle of young rats on one side so altered the structure of their brain case that the operated-on rats might well have been a different species. Their skulls became smooth and they lost the heavy ridges over the eyebrows needed to withstand the pull of strong muscles—exactly the exterior changes that differentiated man from ape-man. The physical pressure of an expanding brain accounts for the vast increase in volume of the brain case itself.

The ape-men of South Africa were the transition stage in which the ape predominated over man. Such was the construction of the palate that they could not have had true speech; but they prob-

ably grunted and cried in moments of stress, communication a little above the warning simian cries of the cousins they had left for ever in the trees.

Later work at allied sites in South Africa brought to light further invaluable finds. The progress of discovery of man's ancestors and relations is confused by many factors. The cry is always for more fossils and more skulls and bones and mute testimony of the past; but sometimes fresh finds are embarrassing. Broom blasted out some breccia—bone-impregnated rock—and exposed a whole, perfect skull. This was the find which he described as "the most valuable specimen ever discovered." But it was a slightly different species from *Australopithecus*. It was a female skull of *Pleisanthropus*, and is familiarly known in anthropological circles as "Mrs. Ples."

Another allied form, discovered at Swartkrans, was named *Paranthropus crassidens*, because its teeth were half as large again as a similar type previously discovered called *Paranthropus robustus*. The latter is the subject of one of the little pleasantries of archaeology. Broom was handed a skull and informed that a school boy had found it. He immediately chased off to the school, found the lad playing and persuaded him to bring out of his pocket four teeth: two he had found nearby and two

he had casually knocked off the skull.

Broom spent more than an hour giving an impromptu lecture on the fascination and importance of anthropology, impressing the school principal so much that he declared the rest of the day a holiday. Broom then went with the boys to a cache where more jaws and teeth, hidden by them in play, threw further light on the remote people who had once lived, fought and died, before ever man walked the earth.

Various times have been assigned to the South African ape-man in the course of evolution. One estimate places them as living two million years ago, with other allied types at 1,200,000 and 800,000 years ago. Disputable evidence of fire has been found on one bone; but it is highly unlikely that these early ape-men used fire as a servant. It is improbable that they used tools for other purposes than hunting; fossil leg-bones, broken to a convenient size, of larger deer-like creatures have been found, which, with wooden clubs and stones were probably their chief weapons. The crushed baboon skulls show indentations that match up with the projections on the joints of the fossil antelope bone-clubs—it is quite likely that Mrs. Ples welcomed her husband with the

dinner after he had done that damage.

Some authorities contend the ape-men's claim to a more than apeish place in the scale of evolution, whilst others feel they lived less than a million years ago. It is generally accepted that they are an offshoot of the line that leads up to *Homo sapiens*; unfortunately, we do not have any fossils of *Homo sapiens* or his ancestors dating from this time.

What is certain is that here, if not a true man, we have walking the deserts of South Africa a creature that is far up the evolutionary ladder from the first timid mammals that crept out of the cataclysm that destroyed the dinosaurs. During the many upheavals through which the Earth passed before the dawn of history, Africa remained virtually untouched. Deposits are known reaching far back in time and this stability, coupled with the discovery of the ape-men fossils, has convinced many anthropologists that man evolved in the Dark Continent and later spread to Asia and the Middle East, where the first true men developed their agrarian city-culture patterns.

Before any such complex cultures could arise there had to be a long period of cautious development of new methods of individual relationships, designed to enable a group to meet new conditions with a tradition of behaviour

as well as maintaining the level already reached. The growth of family life among the ape-men, as apart from the herd instinct of apes, played an important part in man's progress and success over other animal forms. For, with the family, there came tuition and the idea of culture handed down by precept and example from generation to generation. Habit can be as strong as instinct, but is more quickly learnt and is more flexible. Habit is a survival factor implanted in the mind rather than in the genes, enabling a few thousands of years of natural selection to be bypassed.

Looking at the South African ape-men we can say that man has found his ancestors—although not physically so, certainly culturally and morally and mentally so. This was the great childhood of man, and his adolescence was later played out against the majesty of the movement of the mighty ice-sheets when his warm childhood days were forgotten.

From a few teeth bought in a Chinese drugstore, a legend has arisen that proof exists that "There were giants on the Earth in those days." G. H. R. von Koenigswald makes a habit of popping into the shops where the Chinese sell "Dragon Bones." When ground up, these make fine medicine and pep up your virility—according to the Chinese.

This stubborn belief later put many obstacles in the way of anthropologists attempting to excavate sites in China—even leading to a dogged sit-down strike by an old Chinese lady. The Chinese cure for toothache is ground-up teeth. Although not suffering from this curse, von Koenigswald, in 1935, bought a tooth; two years later he bought another, and later a third specimen turned up. In all, forty such giant teeth have been found.

His interest had been aroused immediately he had recognised that the teeth were near-human, patterned after an australopith-human line of development and not after an apeish type. They could have come from a similar type to the South African ape-man—except for the awkward fact that they are the largest primate teeth known. In volume, they are six times larger than modern man's teeth. The one-time owner of these teeth has been named *Gigantopithecus*, a name sufficiently self-explanatory.

Later, in 1941, von Koenigswald was sent a jaw fragment from Java. It was definitely human in type and yet was larger than that of a gorilla. The discovery dazed him.

Von Koenigswald called the possessor of this jaw *Meganthropus*—Megas means great: Just before the war cut off Java he sent a cast to Franz Weidenreich,

who at that time was working at the New York American Museum of Natural History. Weidenreich coupled this jaw in with the giant teeth sent to him previously—the originals of the teeth were carried by von Koenigswald in a little pouch over his emaciated stomach throughout his imprisonment by the Japanese. It looked suspiciously probable that there *had* been giants stalking the earth at the dawn of man's life.

Further research is tending to throw doubts on the giant theories. With fossils of small men with large jaws known in South Africa, it seems that, although these finds in a Chinese chemist's shop and in Java may have come from large pre-men, they were not "nine-foot giants." It is likely that one line of pre-human development went along the blind alley of gigantism, even if only towards jaw size.

When it was believed that man originated in Asia, a young Dutch anatomist, Eugene Dubois, decided that he was going out to Java or Sumatra and there find for himself the missing link between us and the apes. We now know that no such missing link occurs, because we did not originate from the apes of modern form; but in 1887, Dubois, fired by his desire to prove anthropology correct and show the error in the belief in a simultaneous act of perfect creation, was instrumental

in unearthing the next fossil we have to tell us of the story of man's development.

Between 1890 and 1892 Dubois unearthed a number of remarkable and important fossil remains of early man. The wonder of it is that, like Schlieman, the discoverer of the ancient cities of Troy, his transglobal journey was not in vain. At the time, he thought he had found the missing link.

Time was to disprove that, and to place the type of man he found much nearer to us in the evolutionary ladder. With its heavy skull-cap, protuberant ridges and low, underslung jaw, it was forgivable to think of it as an ape. When Dubois unearthed a straight femur, the big bone of the thigh, he kept his discoveries secret for a considerable period.

This discovery meant that men with small brains walked upright! In 1892, in the face of accepted ideas, that revolutionary belief was inadmissible. The Australopiths, which would have told so much, although buried in the earth for a much greater length of time, had to wait a while yet before they again saw the light of day and added their mute testimony.

Dubois had found the famous *Pithecanthropus erectus*. Anthropological terminology takes much from the Greek: *Anthropus* means man and *Pitheko* means ape.

Dubois had found an Upright Ape-man, the fossil that is known as first Java Man. Java was to prove a treasure trove to the anthropologist, and before the scientists were even half finished with the island it had yielded information that blew to shreds the ideas that were sacrosanct in Dubois' day.

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The Gentle Rain

by

JOHN COTTERILL

*There could be no harm in the rain,
none at all. And Carl had more personal
things to worry about than the possi-
bility of getting wet*

THEY JOKED about it, the stillness in the air, the mounting bank of clouds. They laughed in the gathering twilight. And the shop fronts lit up their faces and the beautiful iridescence of their rainsuits.

Women, enjoying their afternoon shopping on a day like many another. Sitting at the round cafe tables in their multi-coloured plastamacs, nodding and swaying in animated conversation like the writhing petals of an exotic flower.

"Can you imagine *me* wearing one of those shocking anti-rad suits? I'd die first."

"My dear, mine went into the incinerator years ago." And they laughed. At their own jokes, at the government, at the civil defence volunteers, who were excited at the chance to prove

themselves after sixty years of mock attacks, public indifference and cheap music hall ballads. They laughed at the added venom in comedians' scripts, and at the advertisements which had been quick to use the general gaiety.

They only stopped laughing to villify their leaders for this outrageous lie, for the claim that the winds and rain reaching them that day had passed through a region of tremendous nuclear activity. Had not the Opposition exposed this as a deliberate scare, designed to direct public opinion from the Government's latest blunder? For once, people believed the Opposition. In a world of lies, of political chicanery and uncertainty, they had learned to rationalise, to accept the most reassuring opinion. Anyway, there was a spice of adventure in defying

the experts, like venturing out in a summer frock when rain is forecast. A gaiety pervaded the noisy, overcrowded cafes, an abundance of wit that kept them past their normal hours. It was only with reluctance that they finally broke up their convivial gatherings to mingle with the throng of equally jovial men on their way home from work.

Spots of rain fell.

Ordinary-looking rain that wet the face and made muddy splashes on the sidewalks. People laughed hilariously. They clutched their chests in mock pain and made exaggerated pantomimes of vomiting. The raindrops fell on them unheeded and only a chance occurrence, an interesting demonstration of crowd psychology, prevented the same massacre as in other cities.

As the rain began to patter more quickly, an old woman collapsed and died in the city centre.

It was entirely coincidental. She had a diseased heart, for which the excitement had proved too much. But no one knew that, and a shock wave of panic was generated in her vicinity that rippled outwards with astonishing speed along the radial avenues.

"Three women dead, more badly burned—five dead—dropping like flies—flesh discoloured and rotting—get indoors." The cry was shouted from lip to lip. "Get indoors—quickly."

There was five minutes of pandemonium, of traffic jams, cursing and frantic bustling. But

when the thunder rolled and the heavens seemed to open and shed its deadly cargo, the rain lashed down onto a deserted city.

The citizens trembled in their protected telerooms. Government prestige rose. Now they were grateful for the legislation they had fought, forcing them to undertake the expensive protection. They remembered with self-righteous satisfaction the neighbours who had cheated and used only a lead veneer.

"Now they'll be sorry. Serves them right for being such misers. They needn't think they're going to use *my* room."

The rain settled to a steady downpour. Knobs were turned and from roofs a liquid sprayed, meeting the wet surfaces to form a milky, viscous foam which spread and encased the house in a white crepe shell.

Along the empty streets moved the police vans taking up stragglers, the civil defence squads in their grotesque suits laying the white foam, and the televans pointing their sensation-hungry cameras into the shop doorways where people awaiting rescue pressed back against the steel doors, staring forlornly at the curtain of death splashing at their feet.

They were no longer laughing.

Carl Anderson walked home with a feeling of relief at escaping from the jumpiness at work which had eaten into him and brought on his old nervous disorder.

Twice during the day the smooth rhythm of the assembly track had been broken. He was tired and irritated, and wanted his drug. He reached home as the first drops fell and went straight into the teleroom, not for protection, but simply because he always took his evening meal there.

"I need an injection," he said curtly to the plump middle-aged woman. She looked at him nervously, but without moving.

"What's the matter?" he asked angrily. "I need an injection."

"I'm afraid to go out, Carl," she whimpered. "Because of the rain."

"Rain!" He fetched the drugs himself, still muttering. All that day people had been repeating, "Rain. Rain," like a lot of silly sheep. Inside, he was like a coiled spring, and his head throbbed with the continuous pulsating roar of a power station.

He sucked petulant hollows in his lean cheeks as he leaned over the controls, flicking over the stations, seeking the music, the gaiety which would bring ease. He loved to sit in the centre of the room, the telescreen stretching on all sides, and imagine he was a privileged customer in a high-class cafe, seeing the cabaret swishing around him with a rustle of coloured silk dresses. Once, as a youth, he had been to such a place and it symbolised his lost happiness.

But whatever station he selected, the telescreen showed the likeness of an Alaskan ghost town, every-

where the same shrouded houses, the desolate white streets.

"Do I get anything to eat tonight?" he enquired wearily.

The woman slid open a cupboard and indicated rows of plastic-wrapped cubes, capsules and thick liquids. "Enough for six months," she said proudly.

"Get me something *decent* to eat." Carl stood up and roared at her in a fury and the woman rushed from the room, more frightened of him in this mood than the unseen peril in the rain.

Carl felt a twinge of remorse. Is she my wife, he asked himself. She had called him Carl, so she could be. He struggled to clear the mist that partially covered his memory. He had found his way home, known about his injection and his evening meal. Perhaps it would be better to let things come back naturally, without trying to probe too deeply.

But that woman, she was older than him. No, he was certain that his wife was beautiful. And so was his daughter—Shirley. Now he remembered her name. He repeated it with delight, "Shirley," and it conjured up her delightful face. But where was she?

He went out into the kitchen. "Where's Shirley?"

The plump woman backed away with a terror on her moonish face that made her look foolish.

"Where's Shirley?" he shouted at her.

"Shirley's safe," she said soothingly.

"Then where is she?"

His question went unanswered and tears welled up in her eyes.

"For all you know, she's out in the rain." He was working himself into a frenzy. Shirley, his lovely young daughter. He could feel a great emotion pricking him at the thought of her fair curls and white throat. And when he pictured her lying out there in the rain, the emotion pounded inside him. He decided that he must love her very much.

"What's Tom's number?" He had remembered something else, that he had a brother, who sometimes took care of Shirley.

He was puzzled when his brother's face, in the small screen, blanched at the mention of his daughter. He hesitated and then stammered: "She's not here, Carl, but she's safe, don't worry, I'll..."

Carl switched off in a rage. "Safe," they all said, but no one really cared. She might be wandering around in the rain or else—A stronger image had presented itself. Of Shirley lying with her golden hair in the mud while the rain fell onto her dainty summer frock.

And suddenly he knew where to find her.

Doctor Benn was reassuring Carl's brother, in his best consulting room manner, over the vidaphone. "Don't worry, Mr. Anderson. I am sure it's just a temporary amnesia. I'll go straight round to see him."

His assistant, Carter, looked at him anxiously when he rang off. "You're not going out there?"

"Don't let a few drops of rain worry you. We shall be safe in one of the protected ambulances. They won't be needed for casualties for a day or two."

On the way out they called in to see Pearson, a young man whose pallid face was flushed slightly with the excitement of all this attention to the long-neglected physics section. Hospital officials filled the small room, peering intently at the dosimeter dials.

Doctor Benn called him. "What's the situation, Pearson?"

"Oh, hello, doc. It's worse than we ever expected. The concentration at the source must be tremendous, considering the decay while the stuff was reaching us. The dummy human outside has taken 1,000 roentgens over the last hour. I don't need to remind you that's a lethal dose."

The psychiatrist nodded. "What about the people inside?"

"A well-protected room will cut radiation by a factor of a hundred. That makes ten roentgens per hour. The body can absorb up to fifty without harm, which gives us five hours of rain. If it goes on at the present rate much longer than that . . ."

There was no need for him to finish. Benn could already see them, jammed into waiting rooms, blocking the corridors, the bewildered faces with the deathly pallor, hair coming out in handfuls and the ugly red blood spots under the skin.

They drove by means of the external viewer through the hushed

white city. Carter ventured to ask: "Are they trying to kill the radioactivity with that white stuff?"

Benn glanced sideways at him with a trace of scorn, a trace of pity. Carter was like many another research worker he had seen, a misfit because his intelligence was good without being brilliant. He would have made a good librarian or abstractor, but the glamour of research had made him attempt what was beyond his ability. He lacked genuine scientific curiosity and couldn't apply the knowledge he swotted.

"You can't kill radioactivity, Carter. What they hope to do is bind the small particles in a matrix before they go into crevices or in the earth. Afterwards, they can peel it off in layers and take it away."

"Clever," Carter murmured with listless appreciation. But his mind did not dwell on it for long. "This man Anderson," he began tentatively, "he's a criminal, isn't he?"

"No," snapped the doctor. "He's a sick man; to be exact, he's slightly schizophrenic. A year ago he killed someone, I agree with you there. But I object to the uncivilised retention of the word criminal to describe a man under the influence of an irrepressible psychotic impulse." He thought to himself, what's the matter with me today? I shall have to get myself psychoanalysed! I'm as grumpy as an old bear.

The young man sat back abashed and maintained a sullen

silence for the rest of the journey. Benn relented a little before they pulled up at the Andersons' and added, mildly: "Carl is a man who loves—and hates—far too strongly."

They rang repeatedly before an anxious Mrs. Marlow ventured out of her lead-encased hideaway. Carl had gone. "I tried to stop him, doctor. But he was in that state—you know what I mean. He went out into *that* without even a raincoat." She shuddered.

"How long has he been gone?"

"I don't know—three quarters of an hour, perhaps."

"All right, you go back inside, Mrs. Marlow. I know where to find him."

Benn drove off madly, the wheels crunching and churning up the white carpet. There would be others like Anderson he reminded himself. Death, and a horrible death at that, would be common. And yet this was different—Carl was his patient. He tried in vain to think there was still hope. By the time they found him he would have been an hour in the rain.

And that, Pearson had said, was a lethal dose.

Carl was heedless of the rain that drenched his clothes and dripped off the lank black hair onto his furrowed brow and splashed over his nose and cheeks. He could only think of Shirley, out there in the rain. "Shirley," he called and the word was absorbed in the white sponge and the street was silent again.

It's raining, he thought. And yet everywhere is white, like Christmas in the village many years ago. Ah! Those were the times. Scrambling back through the moonlit snow to see the firelight reflected on glowing faces. He would like to go back and again be surrounded with people he loved. Why should they force him to work in the arms factory? Surely there was a village left, somewhere. A haven for himself and Shirley and—his wife. His brain sought vainly for her name.

But now he could remember how she looked, slim and delicate and lovely. And then he saw her lying very still with a more intense pallor, her beauty hard and fixed, and he felt a tug of pain and gave a sob without knowing why.

He left the main road and took the path through the wood. The trees moaned around him in the wind, and the rain made a staccato drumming on innumerable unseen leaves. It had rained before, he recalled, when he had brought Shirley that way. And he thought of her in the rain without a coat and broke into a run until he burst into a clearing.

"Shirley!" he shouted to the unanswering night. There was the bush, and there the place in front where she should have lain with her mudstained hair and sodden summer frock.

He screamed. He had remembered. He screamed again, a piercing cry above the wind, and he ran. He ran blindly, into the rain-soaked undergrowth. But

strong branches barred his way, the thicket snatched at his clothes, and the dark circle of swaying trees enclosed him with the awful truth.

The prickling, violent emotion he had felt was not love, but hate! He hated the little brat who had killed his wife in childbirth. He remembered again the brittle loneliness of Julia's death mask and his hands tightened convulsively as they had done around the throat of the dimpled, three-year-old murderer.

Then his hands slackened and he sank, exhausted, onto the wet ground. The reality was back with him, his dreams were a tenuous distant mist. That Christmas in the village, what would be the pleasure now, without Julia?

He was infinitely weary. He settled down further until he lay on his back, his head nestled in the yielding compound of mud and leaves.

The rain continued to fall and he closed his tired eyes. Time passed. From a distance he heard his name called. It came nearer, and he recognised the doctor's voice. His glistening face twitched into a weak smile. The doc would find him and cure him again, and then they would take him back to his place on the assembly line. There was no escape.

He opened his eyes and looked up at the dark clouds. The trees swirled dizzily against the troubled sky and the rain fell unceasingly onto his upturned face.

UPSTAIRS

by NIGEL LLOYD

Harry was one of the lucky ones; those who had a good chance of getting into space. It was nonsense to think that he might not want to go.

I GUESS everyone knew that Harry wasn't going to make it. It wasn't that he didn't try, but this was one of those times when just trying wasn't enough. Dolman summed it up one night after lights out when a few of us had got together in the recreation room.

"He won't make it because he can't make it," he said. "It's like trying to teach a dog to talk. No matter how patient you are or how willing the pooch may be you'd both be wasting your time. The dog can't learn to talk because he doesn't have the right equipment for the job."

"Harry's no dog."

"No, but he'll never get Upstairs, either."

I could have argued that but somehow I didn't feel like it. Dolman had lived a lot longer than I had and had been teaching for

more years than he liked to remember. Maybe he'd learned more, too; that or he'd learned how to divorce himself from the problems of others.

"You talking about Harry?" Sam Blake came towards us, a glass in his hand. His face was flushed a little but he wasn't drunk. "That kid's a washout."

"Condemning him before the verdict?" I didn't like Sam and he didn't like me. We didn't hate each other, but we just didn't get along.

"Just giving an opinion." He stared down into his glass. "Hell, Bill, you don't have to take it so personal. It isn't your fault that you got yourself stuck with a stinker."

"Meaning Harry?"

"Who else?" Sam shrugged and drained his glass. "Don't take it to heart, Bill. You don't

get paid to be a nursemaid. What's it to you if the kid don't make it?" He set down his glass. "How about joining me in a drink?"

"No thanks." I crossed to the window before he could make an issue of it and stood, staring down into the quadrangle, pale-lit by moonlight and ringed with the dark shapes of the school buildings. Unconsciously, I looked Upstairs to where an eight-day moon dimmed the stars.

"Dreaming, Bill?" Dolman had joined me.

"Just thinking."

"Of the kid or . . . ?" His head jerked upwards.

"Both." I glanced back into the room. Sam had refilled his glass and was trying to start a poker session. Fred was standing by the record player and a group of the others were arguing the merits and demerits of the new, class-nine trainer. It was a normal, after-duty scene.

"You're letting it get you," said Dolman. "Harry, I mean. You can't expect a hundred per cent. all the time."

"I've had it so far."

"Sure, but there's always a first time for everything." He was, I guessed, trying to cheer me up. "Your record's good, Bill, you don't have to worry."

"And the kid?"

"He doesn't have to worry, either. His old man can take care of him."

"Maybe." I looked back Upstairs again. The moon seemed brighter than ever and I thought I caught a glimpse of light on the dark side of the terminator. It must have been imagination.

"You've got a class of ten," said Dolman. "As far as you're concerned they are simply ten units for processing. The good ones will get through and those who don't make it have no right Upstairs anyway. Your job is to get them through if you can and to weed them out in the process. It's just like sorting apples."

"If you think that, then you shouldn't be a teacher." I stared at him. "But I don't believe you think that."

"It's a way of looking at it." He didn't meet my eyes.

"Maybe it is, but you don't mean it."

"No," he admitted. "I don't. But you'd make it a lot easier on yourself if you could see it that way instead of the way you do."

"And how do I look at it?"

"As a personal challenge. You're determined to get those kids Upstairs by every trick in the book." He shook his head at my expression. "Don't try to deny it, Bill, or act clever about it. You know it's the truth. So far you've been lucky, but now your luck is running out. Harry's going to fail and you know it. For him it will be an episode in life, something he'll forget as soon as he leaves

here. I'm not worried about Harry, I'm worried about you. You're not a man who can stand failure, Bill."

"I've failed before."

"I doubt it. Certainly you haven't failed since you've been here." He hesitated. "Don't hurt yourself, Bill. Only fools do that."

"Then I'm a fool." I stared back outside to where the moon hung in glowing splendour. "But you know, Dolman, I think that I'm in good company."

"All right." He drew a deep breath. "Maybe we're all fools, the latest of a long line; there are many who would call us that. But you'd better get used to the idea that Harry isn't going to make it."

"You're wrong." I couldn't take my eyes away from the moon. "You're all wrong. That kid's going to make it with the rest."

Saying a thing doesn't make it so, but recognizing the existence of a problem makes it possible to do something about it. Harry wasn't going to make it, not unless something was done and done soon. It was up to me to do what had to be done.

Students lived in their own quarters on the theory that solitude made for hard concentration. Companions would have provided a continual source of irritation, and learning to bear with solitude was an essential part of their

training. I knocked on the door, waited for his answer, and then entered the room. Harry would have been within his rights to have refused to see me. It was after class, but respect for the instructors and tradition made that right of refusal purely academic.

"Captain Murbank!" He jerked to his feet and stood, flushed and uncomfortable.

"Relax, this is a social visit." I shut the door and moved towards the table. It was littered with paints, brushes and dirty rags. An unfinished oil leaned against a heap of books. I studied it, then looked at Harry.

"It's not good, I know," he said and flushed a deeper red than before.

"I wish I could do as good." I stared at the painting again. It was a landscape, a thing of distant mountains and tangled undergrowth, with a tiny brook running across the foreground. Birds made patches of bright colour among the leaves and an animal, a deer, I thought, was poised as if about to drink.

"I did it in rec time," Harry said. "I didn't do anything wrong."

"Am I saying you did?" I found a chair and sat down. "A lot of the men paint, some even knit, and one man I knew used to make lace. You get a lot of spare time Upstairs, Harry, and it's a good idea to have a hobby." I chuckled. "But my guess is that

you won't be painting landscapes after you get a clear view of the stars."

"No, sir." He cleared away the painting things, resting the painting carefully against the wall. He didn't look at me.

"Sit down, Harry." I waited until he had made himself comfortable. "Can you guess why I'm here?"

"I . . ." He hesitated. "No, sir." He was lying, but I let it pass.

"Graduation day is getting close, Harry. Pretty soon now those who make the final tests will be wearing their venturis. They'll be on their way Upstairs for the final stages and shortly after that they'll be handling their own ships. You could be one of them, Harry."

"Could I, sir?"

"Isn't that why you're here?"

"Yes, sir. I suppose so." A man would have told me to get out. Harry wasn't a man, not yet, and he was too polite to be honest. I decided on shock tactics.

"You may not know it, Harry, but we instructors run a pot on the result of graduation day. We make bets on each other's pupils. If those pupils pass, then we win; if not, then we have to pay out. You understand?"

"I think so, sir. Like playing the horses?"

"Something like that." I drew a deep breath. "As a horse, Harry,

you're a rank outsider. The betting is that you won't may it."

I was watching his face as I spoke; I wanted to catch his expression. I had expected misery, sadness, even an ironical devil-may-care disdain. I hadn't expected relief.

"I do my best, sir."

"You try," I corrected. "You go through the motions, but that's all you do, and it isn't good enough. I'll be honest with you, Harry; the way things are you aren't going to make it." I leaned forward, my right hand hitting against the table as I did so. I didn't feel it. "You've been in this school for two years, Harry, and before that you went through the mill. You're a perfect physical specimen and there's nothing wrong with your mind, either. To get here you must have wanted to get Upstairs and wanted it pretty bad. What's happened to make you change your mind?"

"I haven't changed it, sir. It's just that . . ." He trailed off, his eyes drifting towards the painting.

"Maybe you're getting a little tired?" I suggested. "I know the training is tough, but the results are worth it. Most youngsters would give their right arms to be in your position; men, too." I tried a different approach. "And your father, what about him? Won't he be disappointed if you fail?"

"I suppose he will."

"And your mother, what about her?"

"Mother never wanted me to go into space," he said quickly. "It was all father's idea. He's an officer, you know, a ground officer attached to White Sands."

"I know." I did know. Colonel Welmar had paid the school a couple of visits, and I remembered him from the old days. I hated to think of what Harry's life would be if he let his father down. He must have guessed what I was thinking.

"Father won't like it," he admitted. "But I'm trying as hard as I can. I can't help it if I'm not just good enough."

I guessed then what the trouble was.

I'm no psychologist, but I've commanded men and instructed boys and you can't do either without some insight into the human mind. Harry's father had lived with a dream which he knew he could never materialise and so he had done the next best thing. He had pinned his faith and his hopes on his son. Harry, eager at first, had somehow lost his motivation. I took a chance.

"Tell me, Harry, is there trouble at home?" I smiled at him man-to-man. "You can tell me."

"No, sir," he said quickly, too quickly. "Nothing like that."

I didn't believe him, but I knew better than to force his confidence. Instead, I attacked the problem around the edges.

"When I was young, Harry, and, believe it or not, I was young once, my folks had a terrible argument. I forget just what it was all about, something quite trivial I suppose, but it made a big impression on me at the time. Dad was an engineer and had to travel a lot, so that most of the time I was with mother. Naturally, I was more attached to her than to him, and when the argument started I was all on her side." I glanced at Harry. He was sitting very stiff and very controlled. "Am I boring you?"

"No, sir, of course not."

"I hope not. Anyway, I wanted to help her and hurt my father and I could only see one way to do it. Dad wanted me to train as an engineer and he'd bought me one of those construction sets. I suppose he'd done it so that I would get interested in building things and I used to play with it a lot. Well, he'd got me started on quite a thing, a working model of a swing bridge, and it was almost finished." I paused. "You know what I did?"

"No, sir."

"I took that model and threw it into the trash can. I jumped on it first and really wrecked it. I was very young at the time, remember, and I figured that I'd



be hurting my father by doing what I did."

"And did you, sir?"

"I suppose I must have done. But I did more than that. I hurt my mother, too. I'd imagined that she would have been pleased at my siding with her, but I was wrong. The worst part, though, is what I'd done to myself. I'd thrown away the best toy I'd ever had, and later, when the argument was all over and forgotten, I missed it like hell. But I never got another one, Harry. My father wouldn't buy me one, and so all I'd accomplished was to throw away something I really wanted. I think it was then that I first learned the foolishness of cutting off your nose to spite your face."

"I see, sir." He swallowed. "But it isn't like that."

"What isn't like that?" I made myself look innocent. "I was just telling you a story, Harry. That was all."

"Yes, sir." He looked uncomfortable. "I wish I could make it, sir, really I do. But . . ."

"Listen, Harry," I said. "Let's get one thing clear. You can pass if you want to. I've never had a failure yet and there's no reason why I should have one now. But first we've got to get rid of the idea that you're going to fail. Once you start believing that then you're finished. Already too many

people believe that you can't make it, but that isn't important as long as you and I know that you can. We are the important ones, and I know that you aren't going to let me down."

"I don't want to, sir." He looked quite miserable about it. "I wouldn't like to do that."

"That's what I told the others." It may have been unfair, but I knew what I was doing. Every man and boy has to have a motivating force for doing what he does. Sometimes that force can come from within so that, no matter what the obstacles, they will reach their goal. Sometimes, though, the motivating force comes from without. They do it because they are expected to. They do it to please their father or their mother, or their wife. They do it for the sake of their children or the society in which they live. When that motivating force fails they lose strength and, unless it is resumed or replaced, they fail.

An instructor, to a schoolboy, can be even greater than his father. The affinity is closer, the influence stronger, and, if properly channelled, the motivating force can be even more powerful.

If Harry wasn't going to pass for himself or for his people, I wanted him to pass for me.

"It's important to you, isn't it, sir?" Harry met my eyes for the first time. "I mean, you'd take it

as a personal thing if I were to fail."

"Yes, Harry, I would."

"I . ." He broke off and his eyes drifted again to that damn painting. "It isn't that I'm not trying, sir. Honestly it isn't."

"I know that." I rose to my feet. "But I want you to stop telling yourself how hard you're trying. I want you to forget to measure your effort and to stop justifying the possibility of your failure. I want you to forget even the possibility that you might not make it. Act as if you had already passed. Learn to think of your life as if this was a mere episode, a preliminary to what is to come. And work, Harry. Work all the time."

"Is that what you want, sir?"

"Nothing else." I smiled at him and held out my hand, my left hand. "We'll make a bargain, Harry. On graduation day, when you pass, I'll buy you a complete painter's outfit. Is it a deal?"

"Yes, sir." He put out his right hand, remembered, and awkwardly shook hands with his left. "I'll do my best, sir, I promise."

"You'll make it," I corrected. "And I'll help."

His grip was less firm than I would have liked, but perhaps that was because he was using his left hand.

Graduation day was too near for comfort, which meant that

there was no time to waste. During class I could give Harry no more attention than the others, but after class, during the rec periods, I really got down to it.

"Eighteen, twenty-seven, nine, fifteen, five, thirty-one."

"Hundred and five."

"Square roots of hundred and fifty-six, twenty-three, seventeen, nine." I looked at my stop-watch, timing his answer. "Still a shade slow, Harry. If your computor breaks down and you have to find the answer fast you may be in trouble. You've got to train your brain to act as a machine. You've got to let the data in and the answer out without conscious thought." I relaxed in the chair. "It's merely an extension of the multiplication tables. You don't have to take time to remember what seven and eight are, or what five and five comes to, you know."

Or again.

"You're stiff on verbal response to problematical questions. Now, assuming that you are in a class ten waste-disposal rocket lifting radioactive slag from the North Pole to Blind Side on the moon. During take off one of the containers springs a leak and spillage is mounting the radiation density by twenty Roentgens an hour. What acceleration must you use in order to carry the slag on a dump orbit to the Sun before you receive a fatal dose?"

And later.

"Always remember, Harry, that a good pilot must keep a continuous mental record of his course, speed and remaining fuel. He's got to be able to work out his velocity relative to his point of departure at any moment. And he's got to know the amount of fuel he will need to match relative velocities at point of arrival. Now, suppose that you have taken off from Earth at ten G firing for twenty-two seconds, cut to five G for fifteen seconds and then dropped to one and a half G for ninety-five seconds. What is your velocity relative to Earth?"

It was hard, but it had to be done. Harry knew the answers but only repetition could give him speed. But the hardest part wasn't in running over some of the probable examination questions, it was in firing his own enthusiasm.

So I told him all about what it was like Upstairs.

I made a bad job of it. It would take a poet to really do justice to the way men feel when they get into space, and even then he would have to invent new words to do it. It is like a man who has been to Paradise trying to tell of the ultimate in beauty, or someone attempting to describe a rainbow to a man blind from birth. It just can't be done. But I did my best, and part of what I felt must have got through to him.

"You really like space, don't you, sir." Harry stared at me with a kind of wonder.

"Like isn't the word."

"Then . . . ?" He didn't have to finish.

Take a group of youngsters wild with a dream. Test them for every physical defect known to medical science, and then turn those who make it over to the psychologists for still more testing. Then take the few that are left and send them to school.

And for instructors give them the very men they, and others like them, have grounded for life.

I didn't like the system, but there was nothing I could do about it. I didn't like being grounded and watch the fledglings I had helped train take my place, but the alternative didn't bear thinking about. And this way, at least, I was as near as I could ever get to Upstairs.

"Look at it this way, Harry. I'm finished, washed out, useless. I could maybe scrape a living washing dishes or selling things in a store. I could even get by as a mechanic, but I know that I'll never get into space again. And that is how it should be. In the early days we rode the cans by the seat of our pants and learned the hard way. A lot of men died learning, and a lot of ships went to make the most expensive junk pile in history, but we proved that

it could be done. Now it's your turn."

"It doesn't seem fair," he said. "To treat you like that after all you've been through." His eyes dropped to my right hand. "Was it because of that, sir?"

He was stepping out of line and both of us knew it, but I didn't check him. Instead, I stared down at my hand. It was a good hand, the best the medics could provide, but it wasn't my own, and a prosthetic hand, no matter how well made, can never be as good as the genuine article.

"A pilot needs two hands, Harry," I said mildly. "If he hasn't got them, then he isn't a good pilot. And there are no other kind."

"But to kick you out!"

"Steady, son." I grinned at him. "Don't go getting all hot under the collar over what can't be helped. I was lucky at that. Others lost more than just a hand." I got back to work. "Now, let's run over these vector constants again, and after that we'll tackle the gravitational factors." I caught his expression. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Don't lie to me, Harry. What was on your mind?"

"Nothing, sir, really." He saw that I wanted an answer. "I was just thinking that it would be impossible to paint with only one hand."

I told him what I thought of painting.

Graduation day was the climax of our two-year effort, but the actual graduation was window-dressing. The real work was done during and after the examinations, and we all knew the results before the parents were invited to see their sons receive their official sanction.

During the actual examination period I found it impossible to concentrate. Affinity works two ways, and in building up Harry's affinity with me I had also built one with him. Now, more than ever, he was a personal problem.

"Relax, Bill." Dolman pressed a glass into my hand and sat down beside me. "You've done all you could, more than you could be expected to do; now there's nothing else to do but wait."

"Sure." Sam joined us. He was as flushed as ever and more irritating than usual. "I've never seen anything like it since Kenton got fired a few years ago." He leered at me. "He took a personal interest in the boys, too. Too damn personal."

I dropped the glass and rose all in one quick movement. My right hand was halfway to his mouth when Dolman caught my arm. It was just as well he did. The prosthetic hand was made of plastic-covered alloy and what it would have done to flesh and

bone wouldn't have been pleasant.

"You dirty-minded fool!" I've never seen Dolman so angry. "Get out of here and stay out!"

"Like to make me?" Sam was spoiling for a fight.

"Get out or I'll report what you said to the commander." Dolman meant it. "I'm not having Bill get fired for knocking you down as you deserve, but I'm not having you spread filth, either." He pushed me back into the chair. "Sit down, Bill."

"Not until he gets out of my sight." I tugged free my arm. "And while he's at it he can apologise, too."

"I was kidding." Sam was beaten and he knew it. "Hell, Bill, can't you take a joke?"

"No. Not that kind of a joke."

"I was kidding," he said again. "Hell, forget it." He walked out of the room. He paused by the door. "But ten'll get you a hundred that Harry doesn't make it."

"He's needling you." Dolman had refilled my glass and he passed it to me. "Take no notice. He's just envious."

"What of?" The drink was blended rye, nicely iced. I swallowed half of it and looked at Dolman. "Well?"

"Sam's been getting careless. He's been hitting the bottle a little too often, and other things. His record isn't as good as yours and he might not be with us much longer."

"Nice prospect." The news dissolved my anger at Sam; he was more to be pitied than blamed. But his last remark had made me thoughtful. "Did you hear what he said about Harry?"

"The odds he laid? I heard."

"Ten to one against." I swished the remains of my drink around in the glass. "What odds will you give me, Dolman?"

"None."

"Don't you like losing your money?"

"I don't like betting on a sure thing." He was very serious. "Nothing's changed, you know, Bill. Not really."

"Don't give me that." I set down the glass and stared at him. "Are you trying to tell me that Harry still isn't going to make it? After all the sweat and work and worry I've put into him?" I shook my head. "You're kidding."

"I'm not kidding." He sipped at his drink, taking his time about it. "Remember what I told you about trying to teach a dog how to talk?"

"I remember. But Harry's no dog."

"The principle is the same. You can't teach a man something he isn't mentally equipped for. And the instructor hasn't yet been born who can teach a man something he doesn't want to learn." He shook his head at my expression. "I tried to warn you, Bill, but you wouldn't listen. Harry

isn't going to make it because he doesn't want to make it. It's as simple as that."

"You're crazy!" I drove my right hand hard against the chair. "You're as crazy as a bed-bug. Of course he wants to make it."

"What gives you that idea?"

"He told me. He promised . . ." I took a grasp on reality. Dolman was operating on rumour, basing his opinion on what he thought he knew. But I knew better. I'd had those long, long talks with Harry and shown him something of the wonder of Upstairs. The kid had been upset, sure, but that was all over. I relaxed and picked up my glass.

"Sorry, Dolman," I said. "But you're all wrong. Harry will pass with full marks."

"Are you trying to convince me or yourself?" He put out his hand as I straightened in the chair. "Don't blow your top, Bill, there's no need for that. But I've been teaching for a lot longer than you have and I can sense when a student has his heart in his work or not. Harry hasn't. He did have once, perhaps, but not now."

"That's the second time you've been wrong." I finished my drink in a gulp. "Try again."

"I know all about what you've been doing, Bill. But do you know just what you've done? To Harry you are a hero and he doesn't

want to let you down. But to you, Harry is a son; maybe you won't admit it, but he is. If you are his father-image then he is your son-image. You can't have one without the other, not if you are sincere."

"You're in the wrong racket, Dolman." I was disturbed, and when I'm disturbed I tend to get rude. And I wanted to hurt him as he was hurting me. But Dolman wouldn't be hurt.

"You've never been married, Bill, and you've never had a son. To you, Harry is as good as a son, and in him you see yourself. You want to get Upstairs so badly that you can't understand anyone without that same ambition, and in helping Harry you feel that you are helping yourself. That's why you want him to pass. It isn't a matter of retaining your record any longer, it goes deeper than that. You want him to pass because if he fails then you've failed. And I told you once before, Bill, you're not a man who can stand failure."

"Words," I said. "Just words."

"Words," he admitted. "But sometimes they can make sense." He rested his hand on my knee. "Look, Bill, I've stopped worrying about you. Now I'm worried about Harry. That's what we always have to worry about, isn't it? The students, I mean. They must come first."

"So?"

"So I'm hoping that everything turns out all right for Harry."

"It will," I said. "He'll make it."

"I didn't mean that." Dolman looked uncomfortable. "But he won't pass." He sounded as if he were trying to cheer himself up.

The recreation room was full when the news came through. For three days I'd been living on my nerves and drinking more than I should. Classes were over and there was nothing more for me to do until next term. Nothing, that is, but wait. And waiting is the hardest thing anyone can do.

"By God!" It was Sam Blake. He'd been different since our near-fight. "I wouldn't have believed it." He turned from the sheet a messenger had stuck against the wall. "Damn glad you didn't take my bet, Bill."

"How's that?" Perbeck looked up from his game of solitaire. "You have a bet?"

"Almost. I offered Bill ten to one his protege wouldn't pass. I'd have lost."

"Harry?" Perbeck looked surprised. "He made it?"

"Sure. Talk about . . ."

I didn't hear the rest. I was staring at the neatly-typed list of names and there, right at the bottom, Harry's seemed to stand out in bold type. He was last, but that didn't matter. He'd barely scraped through, but that didn't

matter, either. He'd made it; nothing else was important.

I passed Dolman on the way out, ignoring his grab at my arm. The students' quarters were lit; they were among the first to know the results, and a couple of noisy celebrations sent echoes over the quadrangle. Soft drinks and fruit cake, maybe, but to them it was as the finest Scotch would be to me. Success needs no stimulants.

Harry was alone in his room. He was messing about with his paints and looked tired and ill. I knocked and burst into the room before he could answer.

"You've made it!" My prosthetic hand must have bruised his shoulder as I threw my arms about him, but I didn't think of that. "You hear me, son. You've made it!"

"I've passed?"

"Nothing else." I stepped back, letting my hands fall to my sides, a little embarrassed at what I'd just done. "We've done it, Harry, just as I knew we would. Tomorrow you'll be at the graduation and this time next week you'll be on your way to the moon. Upstairs, Harry! Into space!"

"I'm glad I passed, sir. I knew that you wanted me to."

"Me and your father, and everyone else." Something about his attitude chilled me a little. "What's the matter, son? Something wrong?"

"No, sir," he said carefully. "How long will I have to stay on the moon?"

"Three years, maybe five." I shrugged. "But what does it matter? You'll be out where you belong, where every decent man and boy wants to be."

"Yes, sir." He hesitated, looking at his painting, and I had the feeling that he wanted to say something but didn't quite know how. Then I understood. Harry was only a youngster, but he was almost a man. At a time like this a man would want to be left alone. At first, that is; later he would want to celebrate, but not now. Now he would want to sit and think and savour the heady wine of success and anticipation.

But I wanted to celebrate.

Back in the recreation room I called for drinks all round and then repeated the order. I felt better than at any other time I had been at the school, almost as good as I'd felt when I first went Upstairs. I wanted to share my feeling with the rest and if I was a little noisy about it, well, that was to be expected.

"Good show, Bill." Sam meant what he said. His face was as flushed as usual, but his eyes had lost their bitterness. I guessed that he'd had a reprieve. His class had gained a hundred per cent. success, and he'd lost the nagging fear of losing his job. And at this

moment I felt good enough to be polite to my worst enemy.

"Praise Harry, not me. I told you he could make it."

"You sure did, Bill." Evans was a little envious, though he was trying not to show it. "But the kid would never have made it alone. Personally, I wouldn't be surprised if you got a lift after this. Good instructors shouldn't be wasted on a class of ten."

I nodded and called for more drinks and basked in their congratulations. Maybe I was a little swollen-headed, but that was natural. I'd done what everyone said couldn't be done, and I was human enough to enjoy it.

After what seemed a long while, I found Dolman at my side. He wasn't smiling.

"Proud of yourself, Bill?"

"You could call it that." I waved at the steward to fetch us drinks. "I've had a tough time, Dolman, and I'm glad that it's over. But don't misunderstand me; Harry's passed, that's the important thing."

"Important?" He stared down into his glass. "To whom, Bill?"

"To Harry."

"Is it?" He set down his untouched drink. "I had the impression that it was important to you."

"And so it is. It's important to both of us. But I've had my turn, Harry hasn't. Now he can go Upstairs and see for himself what

it's really like." I picked up his drink and handed it to him. "Join me in a toast, Dolman. To Harry and his wonderful future!"

"To Harry!" He sipped at the drink as if it were poison. "Have you seen him, Bill?"

"I have."

"When?"

"Right after I heard the good news."

"How was he?"

"How do you think?" I stared at him, half-annoyed at his seriousness. "Hell, man, how would he be? He'd just received the most wonderful news of his life. How would you be feeling? How would anybody?"

"I don't know." He didn't smile. "How would you feel, Bill?"

"As if I could walk up the walls," I said. "As if I were floating on clouds. I'd want to shout and sing and . . ." I shook my head. "I can't describe it."

"Would you lock yourself in your room and refuse to answer a knock at the door?"

"Maybe. At first, for a while, perhaps. Why?"

"I went to see Harry. I couldn't get an answer."

"Maybe he was out? A lot of the boys are celebrating, remember?"

"I asked after him. No one had seen him, and the light was on in his room." Dolman hesitated. "I'm worried, Bill."

"About Harry?" I laughed, I

couldn't help it. "You worried about him! When he's got both hands on the door to Paradise!"

"I'm serious, Bill." He looked at it. "I'd like to see him." He tugged at my arm. "Let's go."

I could have refused, but it didn't occur to me. And I wanted to see the kid, to share his excitement and, perhaps, to gab a little about what he was going to do and see. I'd left him alone for long enough, and now was the time to celebrate his victory.

I swayed a little as I followed Dolman from the recreation room, but the night air cleared my head and I was almost sober by the time we reached Harry's quarters. I banged on the door.

"Open up, Harry! Friends want to see you."

I waited for maybe ten seconds then banged again.

"It's Bill, Harry. Open up."

No answer. I turned to Dolman and shrugged. He pointed to the transom, brilliant with light. I shrugged again.

"You expect him to switch off the lights at a time like this?"

"Maybe not." Dolman crouched and squinted through the keyhole. The buildings were old-fashioned and the locks were more for window-dressing than for any other reason. I saw a patch of light shine on Dolman's eye as he withdrew from the door. He

stared up towards the transom.
"Lift me up, Bill."

"No." I banged on the door again to cover my reaction. I didn't like the idea of spying, not even when there could be nothing to hide. Dolman gripped my arm.

"Lift me up." It was his expression which did it. I'd never seen him look quite the same before. I stooped and gripped my right wrist in my left hand. He rested his foot on the support and I lifted him as high as I could. He took one look through the transom and jerked his head. I lowered him to the floor.

"Break open the door."

"Now take it easy, Dolman." We'd made enough racket as it was without making things worse. "Harry can't be in there."

"Harry is in there." Dolman was very pale. "I saw him. If he doesn't answer it must be because he's either deaf or . . ."

My heel hit the lock before he had finished and the flimsy panel crashed open.

Harry wasn't deaf.

He hung against the locker door, very frail and forlorn against the painted wood, and his eyes, as they stared at me, seemed to hold a mute reproach. He was dead; from the first I knew that. I had seen dead men before. He'd made a noose of his tie, lashing one end to a hook

and his feet swung three inches above the floor.

I didn't touch him. Dolman did that, cutting him down and resting the body gently on the floor. I didn't even move; it was all I could do to talk.

"Why? For God's sake, why?"

"You're not going to understand this, Bill, but I'll try and explain." Dolman sounded very tired. "Harry didn't want to pass, but there was nothing else he could do. You left him no choice, and he didn't want to let you down. And it wasn't just you. There was his father, his relatives, everyone and all with the same idea. To get him Upstairs. But he didn't want to go Upstairs. So he was going to fail, not consciously, perhaps, but fail all the same. But you stepped in and made it a personal issue. And you were his hero, Bill. He thought too much of you to disappoint you."

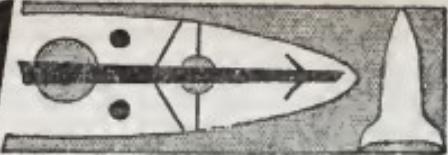
I didn't say anything, I couldn't.

"He was young, Bill, remember that. Too young to defy authority. He took the only means of escape he could think of." Dolman sighed and shook his head. "But you could never understand how he felt if you lived for a million years."

He was right. I could never understand. Harry had failed me, and that was all I could think about.

I don't think I've ever been so sick at anyone in all my life.

BOOKS



THE EIGHTH PLAGUE by Denys Rhodes. Longmans, Green & Co., 13s. 6d., 280 pp.

This book is not science fiction. It doesn't pretend to be and should not be judged as such, but it contains so many of the plot-supports of modern science fiction that a mere altering of placenames and proper nouns could turn it into what would be accepted as a top-notch science fiction story by present-day standards.

The story is of a group of people who are waging a merciless war against an alien enemy. Unless they can beat back this enemy then their immediate surroundings will be overrun and devastated. Hampering this group are self-seeking politicians, blind to the common danger. The people, as usual, are reluctant to accept the seriousness of the menace until it is too late. There is heroism, tragedy, humour, a skilfully-handled love interest, science, problems of logistics, lobbying, the conflict of individuals and the final sinking of personal dislikes in the face of the common enemy.

The alien enemy are locusts, the locale Africa, the group a government-employed team of scientists, experts, aviators, mechanics and local officers. The political conflict is based on the apparent

waste of money, which is used as a lever by a politician who wants to put party before the common weal. He is opposed by those who know just what damage the locusts can do if unchecked. The climax is when the swarms are within an ace of descending on the cultivated areas and threaten to bring near-starvation and bankruptcy. The science is the complete description of the life-cycle of the locusts, the importance of meteorology and the weapons used to combat the menace.

How close this is to modern science fiction is revealed when we try changing a few names. Give the locusts an exotic, alien-sounding name, set the locale on Altair IV, have the "colonists" dependent on self-grown food and have the self-seeking politician a member of the Galactic Council sent to assess waste.

This, of course, is quite accidental. The author did not set out to write a science fiction story; he set out to write one of the most entertaining books I have read for some time. The action is fast, the characters real and the science both educational and enjoyable. Few science fiction readers are such addicts that they cannot go outside the field for literary enjoyment. This is one direction you can't afford to miss.

OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS
by William Tenn. Michael Joseph,
12s. 6d., 255 pp.

This is a collection of eight stories and an introduction which is something of an essay in itself. The introduction is *On the Fiction in Science Fiction*, and the author has something to say and says it with a clarity unusual in such themes.

Of the eight stories my vote goes to *The Tenants* for sheer up-in-the-air ending. An odd couple want to hire the thirteenth floor of a building which has no thirteenth floor. There is a twelfth and fourteenth, but no thirteenth. Business being what it is, they are permitted to hire it and, to the manager's amazement, use it. Tormented by curiosity, he determines to visit the non-existent floor but cannot without a legitimate excuse. This he has on the day the tenants move out. Determined to make the most of his opportunity, he insists on staying after the couple have left. When he tries to leave he can't—you take it from there.

Down Among the Dead Men is a gruesome story of a waste-reclamation building. The waste they process is the shattered bodies of men; the product new soldiers to send to the space battles. How they react to their commander and he to them makes the yarn. A little too sentimental, perhaps, but if you can accept the premise, the rest follows.

The Liberation of Earth and *Project Hush* are a couple of satires. In the first the Earth is

liberated—and how! In the second a spotlight is thrown on the probable results of too much secrecy, and the danger of not letting your right hand know what your left is getting up to.

Firgleflip and the *Party of the Two Parts* are humour. In the first, a man is sent back through time. Naturally, he would be able to show us "hicks" a thing or two, wouldn't he? Well, would he? The second is concerned with the troubles a Galactic Police Force would have when dealing with a collection of alien races. How do you assess crime, and what can you do about it when assessed?

Generation of Noah is a grim tale about a man who could see what was coming and made plans to safeguard himself and his family. His means were logical—too logical for comfort when we remember that the threat is still with us. While *The Custodian* is a neat little tale about the last man left alive on Earth.

Don't hesitate to get this one.

SHADOW OVER THE EARTH
by Philip Wilding. Hennel Locke Ltd., 9s. 6d., 160 pp.

Science fiction, like any other literary field, is not a single unity but contains within itself divisions both of writing, presentation and plot. Adherents of "space opera" will sneer at the involved psychological concepts of one type of story, while those who classify outright action as "juvenile" will favour the slower, more involved type of story in

which everything is worked out to the last decimal place.

From this has grown the fact that many "juveniles" are favoured by some adults, while many "adult" stories are really slanted to a juvenile audience. The fact that they are meant to appeal to the juvenile in each of us in no way spoils their appeal for those who like broad adventure, cosmic events and world-shaking climaxes. The trouble is that you can't have your cake and eat it—not, as yet, in the s-f field. You can have your good characterisation, adult plots and do without the wide-open adventure or take it the other way around.

The plot of this book is simple; in the year 1986 observers are awaiting the return of Halley's Comet. A moon camp is in existence and space flight is an actuality. Then a distant body is sighted and is discovered to be something a lot different from the expected comet. Approaching at a fantastic velocity, it finally swings into orbit between Earth and Sun with the usual dire consequences to the Earth.

Personally, I found the book hard reading, which makes me doubt that it is intended for an outright juvenile. If it is, then the youngsters have certainly increased their vocabulary since I was at school, but the presence of rocket-ship illustrations at the beginning of each chapter seems to be aimed at the younger audience. In short, it comes back to the personal preferences of the reader. If you like pedestrian action interlarded

with plenty of correct conversation, then you may like it.

EARTH IN UPHEAVAL by Immanuel Velikovsky. Gollancz and Sidgwick & Jackson, 18s., 263 pp.

During his lifetime, Charles Fort collected a mass of inexplicable data, collated it, flung it to the public and asked them to demand, with him, a scientific explanation of the odd phenomena. No one has yet managed to evolve a theory to account satisfactorily for what he recorded and scientists tend to dismiss both him and his works with a semi-contemptuous indifference calculated to drive the Forteans to a state of frenzy.

Now Velikovsky comes along with a collection of data which, on the face of it, will take some shrugging off. This book is a sequel to *Worlds in Collision*, and in the earlier book the author drew certain conclusions from the folk-history of innumerable peoples; namely, that only 3,500 years ago a tremendous cataclysm occurred. In this new book the evidence stems from something more substantial; the Earth itself.

As archaeologists well know, the soil and rock of the planet are the best history books there are. Once disturbed, the ground will carry evidence of the disturbance for an incredible number of years. A post hole, dug 5,000 years ago, can still be recognised as a post hole. When we find huge piles of bones mingled with charred wood; rocks from mountain ranges displaced several hundreds of miles

to a region devoid of other traces of that rock, and clear evidence of fires happening at the same time over a large area of the planet, we have something which gives food for thought.

Velikovsky gives a world-wide record of such phenomena and, as he gives copious footnotes by which his statements can be checked, it would be wrong to assume that he is dreaming it all out of thin air. The evidence exists; the interpretation of it could be the one given by the author.

That interpretation is that, not too long ago, the Earth was in a colossal upheaval and not once, but twice. The earlier some thirty-four centuries ago and the other only twenty-seven centuries, well within the span of recorded history. Why wasn't it recorded? For that you need the earlier book, in which Velikovsky says it was, but in this book he simply points to the evidence, draws attention to certain scientific inconsistencies and raises a questioning eyebrow.

This one is good.

Forecast

The best kind of weapon is one which cannot be seen, touched, destroyed, or lost, and the best kind of hiding place is the one where such a weapon couldn't possibly be. **ASSASSIN IN HIDING**, by Philip E. High, deals with the existence of such a weapon and the apparently inexplicable events which plague a man who isn't what he thinks he is, but is what he thinks he should be.

THE HONEST PHILOSOPHER, by Nigel Lloyd, tells of a man who knew what he wanted and what others should have. But he forgot something.

THEY BLOW UP, by A. Bertram Chandler. Ships, of course, and what can happen when they do makes an exciting and logical story.

SALUTE YOUR SUPERIORS! by John Kippax, tells why you should be very careful to do just that.

PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR, by William E. Bentley, shows just what is the trouble with omnipotence.

DEAD WEIGHT, by Douglas West, delves deeper into the complexities of a civilisation cursed with the discovery of Doctor Blue; a civilisation which has banished natural death without doing anything to temper the inherited law of the jungle, and Part 7 of the **EVOLUTION OF MAN** continues to show the progress of man.



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